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Prioritizer-in-Chief:
The Role of the President in the Policy Process from Reagan to Obama

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Prioritizer-in-Chief:
The Role of the President in the Policy Process from Reagan to Obama

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For my mom, Marjorie, and my sister, Jillian.

In memory of my dad, David, and grandfather, Arthur.

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Prioritizer-in-Chief: The Role of the President in the Policy Process from Reagan to Obama

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This dissertation sets out a fresh approach to understanding presidential decision-making by connecting the presidency to information processing theories. This approach to behavioral choice highlights how the structure of the presidency creates a decision-making process that relies on the cognitive and emotional capacities of the individuals in the office, while the political and policy environment put pressures on their choices. Once presidents have decided to get involved in policy making, they have to process information about the responsibilities of the office, the policy and political environment, as well as their own political strength, to make decisions about what policy areas to prioritize and what strategies they should use to pursue those policy goals. To examine those decisions and understand the forces that shape them, I analyze ten datasets of presidential actions, seven of which are original to this project: presidential press conferences, budget messages, State of the Union addresses,

major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of Congress, proclamations, memoranda, signing statements, executive orders, and veto threats. By examining these datasets of presidential policy action, from Ronald Reagan (1981) to Barack Obama (2014), we gain a clearer insight into the decisions that presidents make about the policy process, their strategies, and the factors that affect their abilities to make trade-offs between their policy priorities and strategies. This dissertation makes a contribution to the presidency and policy process literatures by moving towards a empirically-grounded study of the presidency, one which relies on the combination of theory and data to better understand the decisions that presidents make and the factors that shape those decisions.

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Introduction

1.1 Presidential Decision-Making in the Modern Presidency

The week of November 20, 2014 was a big policy week for President Obama. After months of inaction by the House of Representatives following the Senate's passage of comprehensive immigration reform, President Obama grew impatient. He took action into his own hands and he issued a pair of presidential memoranda aimed at changing the immigration system. He followed these memos up with a wide array of interactions with the press and public to explain his actions. But that's not all he did that week. He also addressed the press and public following the grand jury decision in Ferguson, MO, dealing with the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, by the police; signed a memorandum reducing the amount of oil bought from Iran; made remarks on the resignation of Chuck Hagel as his Secretary of Defense; and proclaimed it to be National Family Week. All of these activities, to one degree or another, required presidential attention. All of these activities required the president to make decisions about what policy areas to prioritize and which actions to take in order to prioritize them.

Every day the president is faced with a series of choices: what do I pay

attention to today? Do I advance my health care reform agenda or do I focus on foreign relations? Do I tell my budget director to focus on military spending or on education? Should I sign an executive order or should I go to the public and talk about an issue in order to try and get it through Congress? What is the media doing, or Congress, and what does the public care about? All these questions, and many more, shape the landscape of presidential decision-making. The range of what a president can do or prioritize is vast, while his time and ability are not.

Presidential decisions are the backbone of the president's role in the policy process. While formal presidential powers, as set out by the Constitution, are limited, the role of the president in the policy and political world has expanded drastically over the 20th century (Schlesinger 2004; Rudalevige 2005). Presidents are now a central figure in most major policy fights; so a presidential decision about what to pay attention to and how to get involved in an issue can have a profound effect on the policy process and policy outputs.

Presidential decision making matters because the choices presidents make have long lasting and far reaching consequences for both the American people and people around the world. On the eve of the Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush was faced with a series of choices: to send American troops to fight back against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or seek non-military solutions; to try to form a multinational coalition or to go at the mission alone; whether to try and topple Saddam Hussein and his regime or merely get them out of Kuwait? The result of each of these decisions would have

drastic consequences for how the war could unfold; consequences that would shape the scope of the military conflict, the number of wounded and killed, the length of the conflict, and the events that occurred subsequently. It cannot be overstated just how consequential a presidential decision can be.

The key to understanding all presidential decision making is to understand how presidents process information. Reasonable people make decisions based on what they know and what they want. But, human beings are not computers; they can't process all the information that they are receiving in a uniform fashion. This means that the process of absorbing information, integrating it into what is already known, and using it to make decisions is done imperfectly. The study of information processing allows us to understand how individuals deal with the information that they are exposed to.

In this dissertation, I set out a fresh approach of presidential decision making, one that is based on how presidents process information and explains how they prioritize policy areas and strategies. This theory highlights how the structure of the presidency creates a decision-making process that relies on the cognitive and emotional capacities of the individuals in the office, while the political and policy environment put pressures on their choices. Once presidents have decided to get involved in policy making, they have to process information about the responsibilities of the office, the policy and political environment, as well as their own political strength, to make decisions about what policy areas to prioritize and what strategies they should use to pursue those policy goals. To examine these decisions and understand the forces

that shape them, I analyze ten datasets of presidential actions, seven of which are original to this project. Presidential press conferences, budget messages, State of the Union addresses, major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of Congress, proclamations, memoranda, signing statements, executive orders, and veto threats give us insight into the wide range of ways that presidents try to affect policy. By examining these datasets from Ronald Reagan (1981) to Barack Obama (2014), with a total of 27,022 observations, we gain a much clearer insight into the decisions that presidents make about the policy process, their strategies, and the factors that affect their abilities to make trade-offs between their policy priorities and strategies. This makes a substantial contribution to the presidency and policy process literatures by moving away from purely theoretical and case-based studies of the presidential policy decision-making toward an empirically grounded study of the president, one which relies on the combination of theory and data to better understand the decisions that president make and the factors that shape those decisions.

1.2 A Review of Information Processing

Decisions are a product of how information is processed. In the information processing perspective, the individual is boundedly rational; a decision maker who tries to make the optimal choice, but as a result of cognitive and emotional limitations and an inability to adapt as information changes, makes imperfect decisions (Simon 1957, 1983; Simon and Associates 1986). This perspective is widely used in the policy process literature, as it emphasizes the

various challenges decision makers face (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Workman 2015; Jones, Sulkin and Larsen 2003; Jones 2001; Workman, Jones and Jochim 2009; Boydstun 2013). In the information processing perspective, information is abundant and decision makers must try to sort through the vast amount of information that is at their disposal in order to make decisions. This dissertation explores how presidents process information to make decisions about what policies to prioritize and what strategies to utilize.

Before we can begin to understand how presidential decision-making is shaped by information processing, we must understand why it is important to focus on information. Information is central to decision makers' ability to understand policy problems (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Jones 2001). Policy problems are the issues that require attention and they are often complex; a function of ever changing situations and are constantly being shaped and reshaped by the actions of decision makers (Kingdon 1984). This constant change provides new information for decision makers and their ability to incorporate the new information into their understanding of the policy area is a key factor in how they match problems with solutions.

To fully understand the information processing perspective, we must begin by appreciating its theoretical underpinning: bounded rationality. Bounded rationality centers around the idea that decision makers are goal oriented and purposeful (Simon 1947). However, this framework recognizes that individuals face many limitations, such as limits on their time and cognitive and emotional

capacity, all of which lead actors to make errors in their decision making and reduce their ability to adapt (Simon 1983; Jones 2001).

In order to understand decision making in a boundedly rational perspective, we need to appreciate the many ways decision makers are hampered by their cognitive and emotional limitations. Individuals come into the decision making process with prior knowledge and biases (Jones 2001; Tversky and Kahneman 1973; Kahneman and Tversky 1977; Kahneman, Tversky et al. 2003). These can have a substantial impact on their ability to absorb new information, causing them to ignore some problems or information in favor of information that confirms their views about the world (Gilovich, Griffin and Kahneman 2002). In the development of the Iran-Contra crisis, President Reagan's belief that the spread of communism in Central and South America was a significant threat to America dominated his decision-making (Reagan 1990, p.476-477). His strong beliefs empowered members of his staff to continue sending aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, despite the formal denial of aid from Congress. This resulted in one of the greatest crises of the Reagan administration and called into question the appropriate level of presidential involvement in decision-making. President Reagan's emotional connection to the policy position prevented him from being able to absorb all the information about the political environment, namely, the level of censure that would rain down on all connected when Congress discovered that funds were directed towards the Contras. By ignoring Congress and relying on his own beliefs, Reagan and his advisors created an unnecessary controversy for his own administration,

they they might have been able to avoid had emotion and beliefs not governed the decision making process.

Another component that is important for presidential decision-making is the way cognitive and emotional limitations distort information. In the previous example of President Reagan and aid to the Contras, he ignored information, which had a drastic effect on his decisions, but this is not the only way decision-making can go wrong. Decision makers can also struggle with how to integrate information from different sources (Jones 2001). Cognitive and emotional biases have the potential to cause decision makers to privilege information from a particular source over others or to inaccurately combine the implication of one piece of information with the implications from another source (Jones 2001). One example of this was in President G. W. Bush's response following Hurricane Katrina. Before the storm, the Stafford Act of 1988 and existing protocols dictated that the federal government was to become involved in the disaster response only at the request of the state, with state and local governments taking the lead. Leading up to when the storm made landfall in New Orleans and in the immediate aftermath of Katrina, President Bush relied on information from Governor Kathleen Blanco and Mayor Ray Nagan,who were concerned with avoiding blame as well as solving the problem, to make decisions about federal involvement (Bush 2010, p.309-332). As decisions were made and new information came in about the scope of the storm and the damage that resulted from the broken levees, it became clear that the federal government response had come too slowly and inefficiently

to adequately address the crisis. Additionally, President Bush's decisions to make a trip to California and Arizona, to do flyovers of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, and to say that FEMA Director Michael Brown was doing "a heck of a job," all decisions based on his understanding of the situation and the information he was receiving, led many Americans to believe that the President didn't care about victims of the storm nor that he desired to help relieve the suffering (Bush 2010). Instead, the decision to do and say these things was the result of distorted information and the privileging of some sources (Blanco and Nagan) over others. The processing of information relies on the ability to evaluate the quality of the source of information, which can be just as hard and just as consequential as anything else.

Organizations and structures can help individuals overcome the cognitive and emotional limitations that were the defining characteristic of each of these cases (Simon 1947). Herbert Simon's theory of organizations was built on the idea that if people could organize, the could create structures using the division of labor and specialization to avoid the downfalls of individual cognition. In each of these cases, presidents could have used the structure of the people around them to make better decisions, but the final decision-maker aspect of the presidency prevented them from seeing the flaws in front of them. It is worth noting, however, that organizations are not magic bullets to be used to overcome the flaws of individual decisions makers. Organizations are made up of individual decision makers and when there is a flawed decision at the top of the organization it can trickle its way down, preventing the organization

from correcting for the individual's flaws.

In each of these cases, the cognitive and emotional limitations of the decision makers had an obvious and substantive impact on the outcome of the case. The impact of human limitations on decision making is not always so clear; more often, these biases work in subtle ways, ever so slightly altering an individual's decisions. Thus, it is important to move away from studying an individual case or decision and take a broader perspective at the way individuals, and more specifically presidents, process information.

1.3 The President in the Policy World

The president is a central actor in the policy process. Scholars in both the presidency and policy subfields have noted the importance of the president for policy change (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Kingdon 1984; Light 1991). In many ways, the president is the ultimate policy entrepreneur, capable of linking problems and solutions and identifying windows of opportunity to create policy change (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; Kingdon 1984). Presidents are also thought to be important at many stages of the policy process from agenda setting at the beginning (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Kingdon 1984) through to shaping policy in later stages of policy decision-making using veto threats (Deen and Arnold 2002; Kernell 2006; Matthews 1989; McCarty and Poole 1995; Lewallen 2017). But the modern role of the president in the policy process is the product of evolution over time.

At the time of the founding, the presidency was envisioned as a response

to the failures in the Articles of Confederation — without a chief executive, the federal government lacked the energy to move to action in response to problems (Morris 2010). As such, the Constitution created a chief executive and set out specific powers, limited in number, with the idea that the executive would be subordinate to the legislature. Throughout the 18th and 19th century, presidential power waxed and waned, but the office was generally subordinate to Congress. It wasn't until Franklin Roosevelt that the modern presidency, with its significant policy role and expansive powers, began to take form (Rudalevige 2005; Schlesinger 2004). In many ways, the modern president is a policy maker that the founding fathers never would have found acceptable.

Even though the founders never imagined the president at the center of the policy making story, he as grown magnificently into that role. In this dissertation, we will study presidential decisions to understand the role the president plays in the policy process. Specifically, I am going to study what policy areas the president pays attention to and the strategies he uses to prioritize that attention. Using seven new datasets, plus three existing ones, with a total of 27,022 observations, I will examine the decisions that presidents make to empirically explore what the presidency literature has theorize about, confirming some expectation, while turning others on their heads. While the bulk of the data analysis are in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, I begin to bring in data even in this chapter, as our fundamental understanding of the presidency requires thinking about and exploring what it is that presidents

actually do, rather than staying with what we think they do.

There have been many instances where presidential attention to a policy area was the necessary component for policy change. One instance during the Obama administration was an attempt to tackle wide-scale immigration reform. After years of unsuccessful legislative attempts to reform the immigration system, ranging from an effort in 2006 that took extremely different forms in the House and Senate, with both sides refusing to budge, to the DREAM Act, which was introduced in 2007, 2009, and 2011, and passed by the House in 2010, President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative. The DACA program, which was implemented via a memorandum issued by Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, created certain criteria that, if fulfilled, would allow undocumented immigrants, who had been brought to the country as children and who were productive, law-abiding individuals, to stay and work legally in the country. This policy largely mirrored the goals enshrined in the DREAM Act, but as Congress had been unable to pass it, and it seemed likely that the policy stalemate in Congress would continue, presidential unilateral action was the only force that allowed policy change to occur. While the program received Republican resistance in Congress, presidential prerogatives were sufficiently strong and the policy design sufficiently insulated from congressional activity to allow the policy to go into effect.[1]

[1]The postscript to this case, with the repeal of DACA under President Trump underscores the long-term dangers of making policy via unilateral action.

But the story of policy change is much more complex. Presidential attention and decision making is not always enough to create policy change. Just as President Obama was able to change policy for the undocumented immigrants who were brought to the country as children, he attempted to reform the immigration system to allow the undocumented parents of U.S. citizens to stay and work legally in the United States. President Obama's "Memoranda on Creating Welcoming Communities and Fully Integrating Immigrants and Refugees" sparked the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program. Only this time, instead of facing resistance from Congress, who could not muster the support to overturn the presidential action, President Obama faced significant resistance from the states. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, joined by the attorneys general of 26 other states, challenged the constitutionality of the presidential action in district court. The judge issued a preliminary injunction against the action, which was ultimately upheld in a 4-4 decision by the United States Supreme Court in 2016. President Obama's 2014 actions to expand legal status to undocumented immigrants were never implemented. This is not the only time presidential action ended in defeat. Presidential involvement in the policy process is a complex thing; sometimes presidential involvement is decisive, and sometimes it is like tilling at windmills, a seemingly possible and justified effort that ends up being completely impossible given the broader reality.

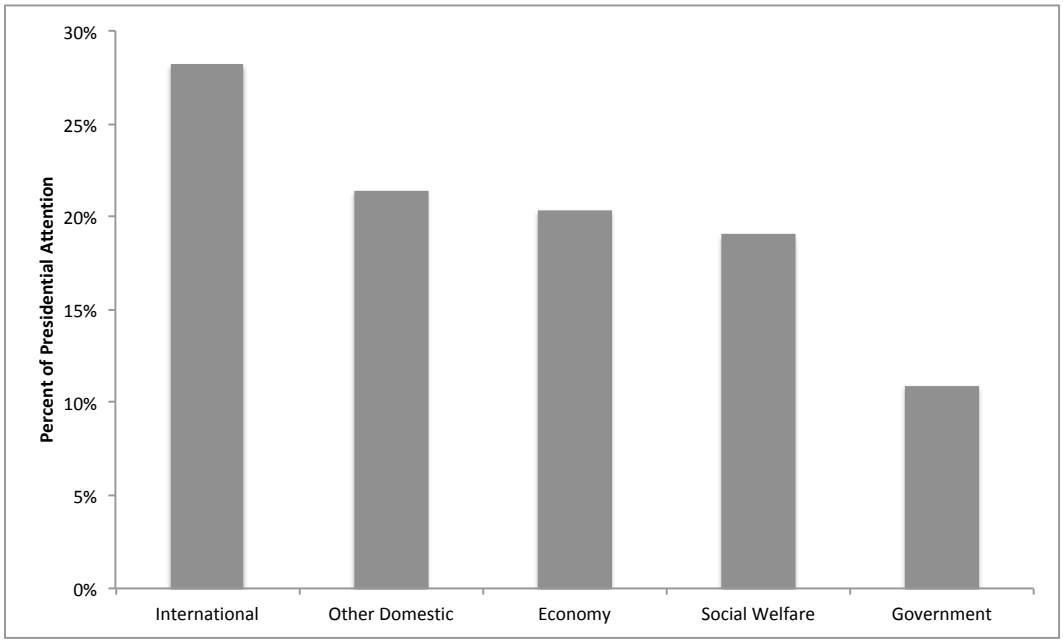
Much of the research on presidential involvement in policy revolves around how presidents interact with executive agencies (Lewis 2004, 2008; Moe

1989) or the legislature (Beckmann 2010; Shull and Shaw 1999). Many of these works examine the relationships using principal-agent models, highlighting a formalized structure where presidents must incentivize those beneath them to provide them with information. While these studies attempt to understanding these complex relationships, the theories force us to look at how presidents operate with other institutions, rather than trying to understand presidential decision-making comprehensively.

1.3.1 Presidential Attention to Policy Areas

One characteristic of presidential decision making that is extremely important for understanding their decisions is the limited attention of the president. Presidents have only so much time in the day, and while they can staff information gathering and some preliminary decision making out to subordinates, they have to play an active role in directing the efforts of the White House (Johnson 1974; Witherspoon 1991). This limited attention raises questions about what policy areas we should expect to see presidential involvement. Presidential involvement in most policy areas produces very little direct change. Instead, change comes because many actors get involved in the policy process surrounding an issue. That need for collective action means that there is increased uncertainty about what will be the outcome of presidential attention. There are a few policy areas presidential decisions are given primacy because of the Constitution, such as foreign affairs, defense, and government operations. Yet when we look at Figure 1.1, instead of seeing presidents restrict

Figure 1.1: Histogram of Presidential Attention to Policy Areas



Source: All data including Presidential press conferences, budget messages, State of the Union addresses, major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of Congress, proclamations, memoranda, signing statements, executive orders, and veto threats from Ronald Reagan (1981) to Barack Obama (2014)

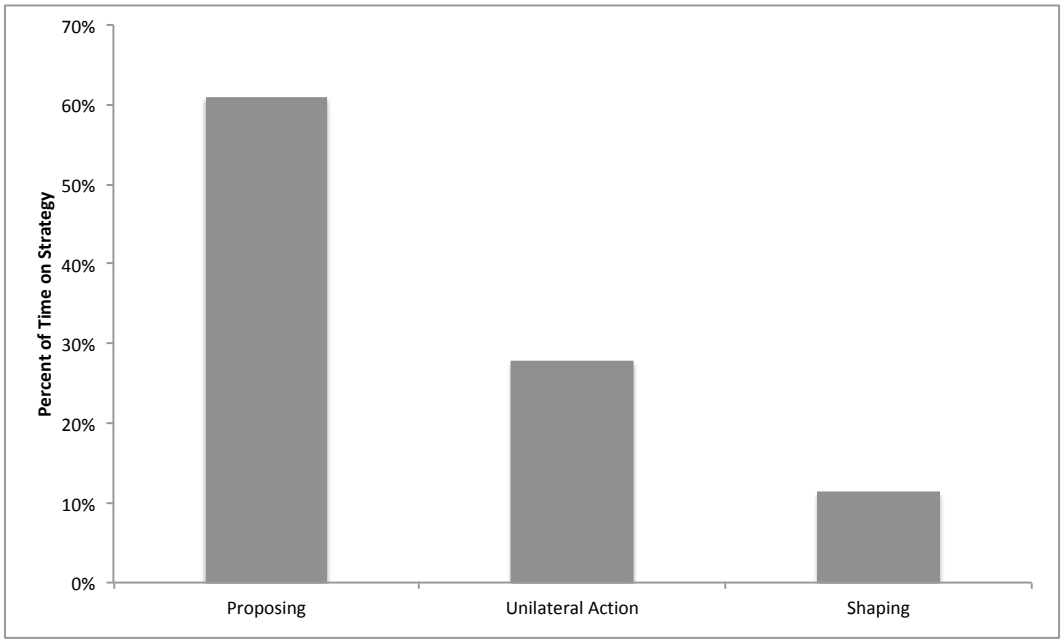
themselves to those areas in which they have a guarantee of success, we see them get involved in a wide range of policy areas, with approximately 60% of their attention devoted to policy outside of their constitutional obligations.

1.3.2 Presidential Tool Strategies

Setting aside the issue of what policy areas the president pays attention to, we are left with another substantial question: what strategies do presidents use to get involved in policy? While the president has many tools at his disposal, they can be broadly categorized into three general strategies: proposal

tools, shaping tools, and unilateral tools. When making the choice about what strategy to take, presidents must consider the costs and odds that each type of action will help him get his desired outcome. Unilateral actions have the lowest costs, indeed the president makes the decision to pursue policy on his own, and in the short term, the highest certainty of producing policy change the president likes. Unilateral tools are not completely free of costs, however. If something goes wrong, or the policy is very unpopular, the president has no one else to blame: it was his action, thus his fault. Presidents also have the ability to propose policy. These actions are also very low cost, as the president is simply communicating what he thinks should be done, but it can also be very ineffective as proposing policy necessarily means that there are other decision makers involved and they can chose to ignore what the president is proposing. Yet in spite of the potential for nothing to happen following a presidential proposal, we regularly see the president propose policy. Indeed the president's most famous policy action every year is his State of the Union Address, a pure proposal tool. The third type of strategy the president has for policymaking is shaping policy at the later stages of the policy process. Through issuing veto threats and making signing statements, presidents can exert force on legislative activity as it nears implementation. These actions are higher cost, as a veto override or court challenge to bureaucratic implementation can seriously harm the president's political capital, but the odds of getting what he wants can also be quite good. Congress often struggles to overcome the high bar needed to protest presidential action, allowing presidents who want to make

Figure 1.2: Histogram of Presidential Strategies



Source: All data including Presidential press conferences, budget messages, State of the Union addresses, major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of Congress, proclamations, memoranda, signing statements, executive orders, and veto threats from Ronald Reagan (1981) to Barack Obama (2014)

policy through the shaping strategy considerable latitude. When we look at Figure 1.2, we should expect to the president to regularly issue veto threats and signing statements, due to that high return on investment, but in reality we see these are much more occasional tools, as they require Congress to make policy first.

These findings illustrate why we must look more deeply into how presidents process information to understand presidential decision-making. There are many different components to the president's decision to get involved in policy. We need an approach to decision making that accepts the plurality of

presidential attention and strategies, while helping us to understand why he makes the choices he does.

1.4 Moving Forward

This dissertation is composed of five substantive chapters. The first, chapter 2, introduces a new way to think about presidential decision making through the lens of disproportionate information processing. Disproportionate information processing highlights that, in a boundedly rational decision making world, decisions are shaped by the imperfect processing of information. In a perfect world, presidents would learn new information and promptly incorporate it into their decision-making processes. Instead, they focus on some bits and ignore others. Or get the new information, but misinterpret its significance. These decisions and errors accumulate so that presidential decision-making is imperfect and disjointed. By studying how presidents try to cope with the influx of information to make decisions, whether through understanding the institutional structure or the way they organize their White Houses, we can learn a great deal about the way presidents make decisions.

The next chapter, chapter 3 examines the set of 10 datasets that allows us to understand presidential decision. Seven of these datasets are original to this project. The seven original data sets look at presidential press conferences, budget messages, major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of congress, presidential proclamations, memoranda, and signing statements. The project also integrates two existing datasets from the Policy Agendas

Table 1.1: Descriptive Statistics of Presidential Policy Tools (Total N=27,022)

Policy Tools	N=	Mean Obs. Per Year	Max Obs. (Year)	Min Obs. (Year)
Speeches to a Joint Session of Congress	9 speeches (1,966 quasi-sentences)	0.26	1 (Multiple)	0 (Multiple)
State of the Union	34 Speeches (10,195 quasi-sentences)	1	1	1
Budget Messages	34 Messages (4,088 quasi-sentences)	1	1	1
Major Televised Speeches	110 speeches	3.2	12 (1991)	0 (Multiple)
Presidential Memoranda	928 memoranda	27.3	53 (2000)	9 (Multiple)
Signing Statements	1,309 statements	38.5	95 (2000)	2 (Multiple)
Executive Orders	1,398 orders	41.1	66 (2001)	20 (2013)
Proclamations	4,410 proclamations	129.7	171 (1986)	72 (1981)
Press Conference Opening Statement	698 statements	20.5	42 (1994)	3 (1987)
Veto Threats (1985-2014)	1,443 threats	42.4	118 (1997)	0 (Multiple)

Project: State of the Union addresses and executive orders, as well as the veto threats dataset, by Samuel Kernell and Jonathan Lewallan, that is also hosted by the Policy Agendas Project. All told, there are 27,023 presidential statements or actions from 1981, when President Reagan took the oath of office, to 2014, six years into the Obama administration. Each statement was coded for the policy area it focuses on. The result is the ability to examine presidential involvement in the policy process through a number of strategies and policy areas. This chapter examines each of these presidential policy tools and looks at how scholar have understood them in the past, and how they can better help us to understand the presidency. The analysis in the later chapters of the dissertation represent the start of the analytical possibility contained in these datasets.

The new approach to understanding presidential information process-

ing is addressed by three main questions analyzed in chapters four to six. Chapter four addresses the first question, which asks what policy areas do presidents prioritize and how do presidents make trade-offs between those policy areas? The findings in this chapter suggest presidents have a core block of issues that they routinely prioritize because they represent their constitutionally mandated powers, but that they also prioritize issues in response to policy problems in the environment and party identification. The second question, which is the focus of chapter five, asks how presidents use the different strategies they have available to them. For example, why might they use unilateral action, rather than proposing policy or shaping legislation? The findings in this chapter suggest that presidents have a substantial preference for proposing policy. This is likely because it is the lowest cost action for presidents to take and it allows them to set the agenda of the larger policy process. Yet, presidents also rely on their ability to shape policy and make it unilaterally. The decision of which strategy to pursue is also influenced by the environment, both by the House and Senate, and by timing, suggesting the presidents are sensitive to the legislative annual calendar and the presidential election cycle. Finally, we examine how presidents make decisions when they are considering both the choice of policy area and the choice of strategy. The findings in this chapter show that presidents prioritize policy differently across the different strategies, favoring their constitutional policy duties in the proposal strategy, but a more diverse agenda in their shaping strategy. This chapter also shows that presidents are sensitive to different forces across the different strategies,

with the policy environment being more influential in the proposal strategy and the political environment being more important in the unilateral action and shaping strategies.

In short, the goal of this dissertation is to understand the decisions that presidents make and what that teaches us about their ability to prioritize the information coming at them from the world around them. To do this, we look at ten types of presidential actions, seven of which are new datasets, to see what decisions presidents have made: decisions about what policies to pay attention to or not pay attention to, decisions about whether to take propose, shape, or make policy through unilateral action, and decisions about how to unify policy areas and tool strategies. All of these choices have dramatic consequences for the policy and the broader world.

This data-driven approach to studying the presidency is path breaking. Many scholars have either ignored presidential decision-making studies or stuck to a case-based approach saying that there haven't been enough presidents in order to study them empirically. I challenge that approach, as the unit of analysis should not be the president, but rather the decision. By taking a decision-based approach, rather than there being 45 presidents, there are over 27,000 decision in just the last five presidents alone. This new approach to the unit of analysis in presidency studies makes it possible to study decision making over time and presidents with out the "small N" problem that limited many scholars in the past. A data driven approach to presidency studies allows us to quantify and analyze phenomenon that we had only ever been able to

theorize about, marking a substantial step forward for the study of presidential decision making.

Chapter 2

A Behavioral Choice Theory of the President

2.1 The Components of Information Processing

The information processing perspectives relies on three core components: the supply of information, the prioritization of information, and the ultimate outcome, the decision. In the first half of the chapter, we will review these three major components and illustrate how they are at the center of presidential choice, before setting out a fresh approach to presidential decision-making, one which recognizes the role of the president as a disproportionate information processor. The last part of the chapter considers other psychological approaches to understanding the presidency and considers how they fit in with our study.

2.1.1 Information Supply

One of the central assumptions about the world in the information processing perspective is that information is abundant and the cost associated with acquiring information is relatively low (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Workman, Jones and Jochim 2009; Baumgartner and Jones 2009).[1] Presi-

[1]This doesn't mean the cost of processing the information is low.

dents are constantly being bombarded by information; whether that information coming from agencies, such as the Department of State or the Office of Management and Budget, or political actors trying to get their desired policy outcomes, such as Democratic members of Congress looking for gun regulations, or from events, such as oil spills and terrorist attacks (Baumgartner and Jones 2015). However, because the competition to get attention is pluralistic, it produces an overlapping and, sometimes, redundant supply of information (Jones, Baumgartner and De La Mare 2005).

When we think of presidential decision-making across the full scope of issues and the wide range of actors providing information, we are struck with the way presidents are constantly bombarded with huge amounts of information. Presidents must learn to problems solve in environments with a lot of information where state of the policy problem is constantly evolving, and consequently, the information that the president has is regularly updating and changing. In the immediate aftermath of the explosion of the *BP Deepwater Horizon* drilling rig on April 20, 2010, the problem was not well understood: initially, information coming from the Coast Guard indicated that "there was no leak at either the water's surface or the well head at the ocean floor" (BBC 2010*b*). Only three days later was it announced that there was a severe oil spill, leaking 1,000 barrels of oil a day into the Gulf (BBC 2010*a*). Ultimately, it took until July 15th for the well to be capped; in the 87 days, an estimated 3.19 million barrels of oil had leaked into the Gulf (Ocean Portal Team at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History 2016). When we think of

the president from an information processing perspective, his imperfect decisions and actions during that period make a great deal of sense. It took three days following the announcement that oil was leaking for the White House to hold a press briefing on the oil spill. In that briefing, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs announced that the president was receiving regular updates as information became known and that the president was dedicated to using all available resources to confront the challenge (Gibbs 2010). The next day, the President issued a ban on new offshore drilling leases, saying that though he " '[believes] that domestic oil production is an important part of our over all strategy for energy security... the local economies and livelihoods of the people in the Gulf Coast as well as the ecology of the region are at stake" (Cooper 2010). Over the course of the next month, President Obama made four trips to the Gulf Coast region, to see the damage and learn about the ongoing efforts to contain and clean up the oil. After weeks of new information and watching the various companies involved in the ownership and operation of the *Deepwater Horizon* platform argue about responsibility and blame for the incident, President Obama made a televised address to the nation on June 15th, in which he talked directly to the nation about the eight week-old crisis, saying "we will fight this spill with everything we've got for as long as it takes" and that "we will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused." He also used the opportunity to talk to Americans about reducing the nation's dependence on oil, using the crisis to illustrate why oil was not a sustainable future (Cooper and Calmes 2010). Each action President Obama took reflected his evolving

understanding of the problems and solutions at hand, an understanding that developed as he was able to process and assimilate information about the oil spill. To process all of the information and make decisions about the best course of action to pursue and how to communicate it to other actors took time and effort.

Decision-making is a cognitively taxing process. One of the aspects that makes it difficult is the information supply. Information is inefficiently supplied, coming from many sources, which often overlap, but in every sense there is far too much for any decision maker to be able to cope with seamlessly. Decision-makers must devise strategies for coping with the information flow. The main way they manage the abundant information is prioritization.

2.1.2 Priorization

One of the characteristics that all decision makers have in common is the scarcity of their attention. Attention is limited for a number of reasons. First, there is only so much time in the day, and not all of it can be devoted to work. Just like every other person, they must sleep, eat, and dedicate some measure of time to other pastimes, so as to recover from the stress of the job.[2] This decreases the amount of time available. Additionally, the president has a variety of other demands on his attention besides policy. Presidents are also

[2]Family time and golf seem to be two of the most popular past times of presidents. Additionally, presidents need some vacation time, though they often bring their staffs with them so as to be able to cope with crises. Crawford, TX under President G.W. Bush and various places around Hawaii, under President Obama, saw a fair bit of presidential time to help them maintain sanity under the pressures of the job.

political strategists and heads of state. This means that they must devote attention to purely political concerns, constituent concerns, and ceremonial matters. By combining the head of government and head of state roles into one person, the founding fathers necessarily prevented the president from spending all his working time on policy making.

How then do decision makers, with limited attention, cope with the oversupply of information? They prioritize. Presidents, like any other political actor, must make decisions about what to pay attention to, and by doing so, they necessarily are making a decision to ignore other things (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Workman, Jones and Jochim 2009). In the information-processing perspective, prioritization is necessary because the environment is information rich (Simon 1983, 2000). One of the challenges of decision-making is getting from raw information to problems and solution. Part of how decision makers make that leap is through interpreting information. Information provides signals about the state of policy problems and solutions, and though cognitive and emotional limitations do not allow decision makers to smoothly process information, they use interpretation to make sense of what it is they are learning (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). When signals indicate that certain information is important—however subjective a construct that might be—that information becomes prioritized for attention moving forward.

Institutions can help with the difficulties of limited attention by allowing for specialization and parallel processing.[3] The Congress is able to process

[3]Parallel processing is the ability to pay attention to many policy areas at once, usually

a great deal more information than the president through the committee structure. Committees allow for members of Congress to specialize in a few areas of policy making. This means that when a bill comes to the floor for a vote, it has already been worked on by members with policy expertise, and the fact that it has been approved by the committee gives a signal to co-partisans that the bill should be approved, so that they, the members who aren't on the committee, don't have to devote their limited attention to the issue (Workman, Jones and Jochim 2009; Shepsle and Weingast 1981, 1987).

Presidents, through the agencies and the Executive Office of the President, have many layers of people who can work on policy priorities. However, presidents are ultimately responsible for decisions. This means that on any big decision, the president must be briefed on the issue and make a decision for themselves; they can not merely rubber stamp the decision of one of their subordinates, without fear of blame should it turn out to be the wrong decision. Much of the discussion in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair concerned the appropriate level of presidential knowledge and involvement in decision-making because President Reagan had taken a hands off approach to policy, once he had set out his desired outcome. Ultimately it was felt that the "buck stops" with the president. He must be knowledgeable, as he is ultimately responsible for the decisions of the executive branch. This means that the president has to do a great deal more serial processing, focusing on

through committees or other structures that allow for specialization. Serial processing, by contrast, means focusing on one area at a time and thus having to make decisions in succession (Workman, Jones and Jochim 2009).

one issue at a time; making prioritization incredibly important in presidential decision-making.

There are many types of information that presidents need to prioritize to make decisions. Whether it is information about what policy area to pay attention to or what strategies and tools to use, the prioritization component of information processing can include many stages. As I will talk about more in the next chapter, presidential information prioritization involves two main types of information: Information about what to pay attention to, which I call policy prioritization, and information about what strategy to take, which I call strategy selection. Each of these stages is a type of information prioritization and it is important to recognize that decisions about how to prioritize these two types of information form an iterative loop in which the choice made to deal with one type of information informs the choice about the other type. Yet when we talk about the information processing perspective generally, as we have been doing in this chapter, it can be much more simple to refer to the larger category of information prioritization.

One of the consequences of the need to prioritize in the information processing perspective is the phenomenon of disproportionate information processing. Disproportionate information processing can be understood as an improvement on incrementalism. In incrementalism, policy change comes as a result of small adjustments on past action (Lindblom 1959; Wildavsky 1964). This model of policy change assumed that information was smoothly integrated in to knowledge and thus transformed the outputs of government sim-

ilarly smoothly (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Yet incrementalism does not fully explain the policy process. While there are indeed times of incremental change, policy change can also occur through large shifts in policy, commonly known as punctuations (Baumgartner and Jones 2009). A major reason these punctuations occur is because the cognitive and emotional limitations of decision makers do not allow them to smoothly integrate new information about the world and transform it into outputs. Instead, new information is often ignored or misinterpreted until such point as errors in the system accumulate and force substantial attention to an issue and correspondingly substantial policy change (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Punctuations signal a significant change in the way an issue or policy is understood, which can occur when a decision maker's understanding of an issue catches up due to the integration of new information. In that case, a punctuation is the result of disproportionate information processing.

Later in this chapter, I will address exactly why we should understand presidential decision making through the framework of disproportionate information processing. However, it is clear enough that those same cognitive and emotional limitations that disproved incrementalism are the same forces which shape presidential attention and decision-making (Larkey 1979; Padgett 1980, 1981).

2.1.3 Decisions

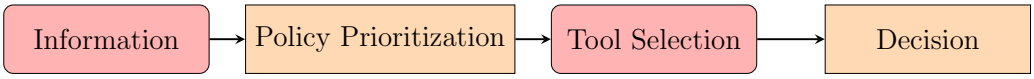
The final component of information processing is the decision itself. Decisions are the concrete outcome of the processing of information. In the information processing perspective, decisions are complex. Decisions are based on information and prioritization within institutional structures, but they are subject to the cognitive and emotional limitations of the decision maker. Remember that individuals are boundedly rational; they use their information and priorities to try and achieve their goals, but they do so imperfectly. This means that there are two potential outcomes: one, in which attention stays on the policy area, where decisions are followed by additional incremental decisions to make adjustments to the original decision, or a second outcome where the issue is ignored once the initial decision is made and errors resulting from the initial decision accumulate to the point where an emergency forms, regaining the decision maker's attention in a large punctuated fashion (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Baumgartner, Jones and Mortensen 2014; Jones and Baumgartner 2012; Boushey 2012; Baumgartner et al. 2009). Decision making as addressed by the information processing perspective seems to do a good job of describing the reality we see in politics. Only by trying to understand presidential decision making through the lens of how he processes information can we understand the relationship between the president and the policy process.

2.2 A Fresh Approach to Presidential Decision Making

Presidential decision making can be understood as a series of winnowing decisions that move the president from the consumption and processing of information through to decisions about what policy areas to pay attention to, what actions to take, which finally culminate in presidential actions in the policy process.

One thing that is important to note as we move forward is that the order of decisions as set out here is a general process. Often, the process does work as described, where presidents decide to address a particular policy problem and then must select the strategy they want to use to attack a particular issue. Yet there are instances in which the decision about what to do comes first and what policies to fill the tool with comes second, as in the State of the Union address. Tradition dictates that presidents give a major policy speech in January or February every year. Faced with that tradition, presidents must decide with what to fill the speech. Some presidents decide to fill the speech with new policy proposals, in the case of President G.W. Bush's proposed education reform, No Child Left Behind, in 2001. Other years, the speech is much more a laundry list of accomplishments, trying to tout accomplishments and please people who care about a particular policy area, as President Obama did in his 2014 address in which he talked about everything from tax reform, to natural gas, physical education, veterans, broadband Internet access, al Quida, Syrian chemical weapons, and the Ukraine, along with many other topics. Or there are moments where presidents decide to set out a big policy

Figure 2.1: Theory of Presidential Decision Making



change via policy proposals and then the details of that policy are created to fit the rhetoric (Tulis 2017). President Johnson created a set of policies to alleviate poverty, by first creating a rhetorical War on Poverty and had to fit those policies to the imagery he had set out (Tulis 2017). Additionally, the consumption and integration of information is an ongoing process through out decision making (Witherspoon 1991). Information is assimilated in fits and spurts, requiring the president to make new decisions in response to new information. As we move through the next few sections, it is important to recognize that the sequence of events set out is an idealized process, but that it represents the full range of decisions, even as the order of decision is not always so neat.

In the first stage of presidential decision-making, the president must work with his staff to winnow *information* that he is receives from the executive agencies and other information sources. The president and the Executive Office of the President must work together to develop a strategy for information prioritization. That strategy is based on the criteria that are important to the individual president, such as the information source, preferences about policy areas, and existing knowledge about the severity of policy problems. These strategies develop as a function of the organization of the staff and the relationship that the president has with individual staff members, both

personally and professionally (Hult and Walcott 2009). Presidential personality and psychology also shape in how they prioritize information and instruct their staffs to pre-process information (Greenstein 2009; Light 1991; Walker 2009). The president's personality and psychological orientation reflect many of the cognitive and emotional limitations that form the biases that lead to disproportionate information processing. Presidents and their individual cognitive and organizational styles will have a strong effect on the prioritization of information, which has consequences for policy selection, tool selection, and policy outputs.

The second stage of the presidential decision-making process is the *prioritization of policy* areas. Based on the processing and prioritization of information, presidents will select which policy areas to pay attention to. The decision is complex, as the decision to get involved in a single policy area is not independent from the decision to pay attention to other policy areas. It can be helpful to think of the presidential agenda space as finite, thus the decision to get involved in a new policy area or increase attention to an area necessarily means reducing attention to or dropping another policy area from the agenda all together. Presidential decision-making is about constantly making trade-off between policy areas in response to needs, preferences, and incoming information.

The third stage of the presidential decision-making process is the *selection of policy strategy*, which we can think of as the selection from a particular set of policy tools. A policy tool is any activity the president chooses to use to

engage in policy making. These can range from tools used to propose policy, to tools for unilateral actions. The choice of tool represents the president's strategy in the given policy area. Presidents have three main strategic paths: propose policy, shape policy, or take action independently. Each of the three main strategies can be fulfilled with a number of different policy tools that further refine the presidential strategy. A proposal strategy is pursued, generally, because it is the easiest and safest policy choice to make. To make policy this way, presidents must appeal to Congress, the courts, the media, the public, and interest groups, explain their positions and implore them to take up the preferred course of policy action. The second strategy is unilateral action. This is where the president takes an action that, without subsequent action from Congress or the courts, changes policy and doesn't require anyone else's participation. Unilateral action, as a strategy for presidential policy action, has grown immensely over the past 30 years in response to increased gridlock elsewhere in the policy process (Cooper 2014; Gitterman 2017; Mayer 2009). The third strategy that presidents have a their disposal is to shape policy towards the end of the legislative process, just as legislation is about to be enacted. Shaping tools allow Congress to do the heavy lifting of enacting policy change, but allows the president a voice should Congress want to enact something that he dislikes or disagrees with. Shaping tools are very useful as the policy outputs are laws and consequently more durable than unilateral actions, but the president also has some credible power at that late stage in the processes, as veto overrides are hard for the modern partisan Congress to

execute.

The fourth stage of the presidential decision making process is the culmination of the prior stages, the *decision* itself. This is the action that the president takes. It is a direct result of the three prior stages in that the information informs the choice of policy and strategy to create the action. Presidential actions are the stage of the process that we, as scholars, get to observe directly. From it, we can learn how, when, and under what conditions presidents pay attention to a policy area and use a policy strategy. The presidential output has the ability to directly generate the president's preferred outcome, whether that is policy change or stasis, but it does not guarantee that outcome.

2.3 The President as a Disproportionate Information Processor

Central to this theory is the need to understand the president as a disproportionate information processor. As discussed earlier, disproportionate information processing recognizes that information is not always smoothly integrated into decision-making, because cognitive and emotional limitations make it difficult to integrate new information. Disproportionate information processing highlights that, when information is fully integrated, it can trigger an often belated shift in attention. These belated shifts are a response to error accumulation and friction in the political system (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). Presidents are highly susceptible to the forces that make in-

formation processing disproportionate. In particular, information oversupply, institutional friction, and serial processing have particularly strong effects on presidents.

President's are highly susceptible to disproportionate information because of the structure of the institution. The presidency is profoundly shaped by the unitary nature of the executive. At the founding, the framers felt that it was important to create an institution that could make decisions decisively and move quickly. That "energy" has made the presidency particularly vulnerable to cognitive and emotional limitations because of the reliance on one man. When the president gets an idea in his head, it can be very difficult to dissuade him from a course of action. In the previous chapter, we discussed the limitations that lead President Reagan into the Iran-Contra scandal. His inability to process the information he was receiving about Congress's position lead him to make decisions that he might not have made if he was aware of the potential consequences. In order to understand the president as a disproportionate information processor, we must consider the ways the president receives information from the world around him and the way in which he processes it.

2.3.1 Information Pre-Processing

As discussed earlier, the decision-making environment is oversupplied with information. From morning to night, the president is constantly being exposed to new information. That information comes from many sources, such as executive agencies, the public, Congress, the courts, the media, and

interest groups. Presidents can receive information in two forms: raw and pre-processed. Raw information is facts such as weather reports, foreign intelligence, or the text of a bill that has been introduced. Presidents are ill equipped to process raw information, in part because raw information is the most abundant form of information (Light 1991). Raw information has little to no interpretation associated with it and it takes a great deal of the president's most precious resource—time—to process. Additionally, to get the most out of raw information, the person processing it needs some context and expertise; it takes skill to figure out if what is in front of you is critical or worthless. Presidents may have subject expertise in some areas, but they are certainly not experts in all policy areas, nor do they have the time to process raw information even in areas where they are knowledgeable. Without filters in place, decision makers can get overwhelmed, making it difficult to react appropriately to all the data (Wagner 2010). A failure to have sufficient filters in place to pre-process information for the president exacerbates the shifts in attention from topic to topic, as unfiltered information would leave presidents unprepared for oncoming policy problems and force them to be even more reactive than they already are. Presidents need people to pre-process most information.

One example of information pre-processing is the President's Daily Briefing (PDB), a regular meeting or memo in which the president receives national security information and classified briefings. The PDB contains high-level intelligence and analysis about countries and events around the world

and how they relate to U.S. national security. The memo is produced by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and is specifically for presidents and their top advisors (Priess 2016; Savage 2016). The PDB is an excellent example of both the potentials and the pitfalls of pre-processing. National security and world affairs are areas that produce a great deal of raw information. Every day, thousands of U.S. intelligence agents, both domestically and abroad, and diplomats stationed abroad gain information that could be useful for the national interest. That information works its way up the intelligence chain to Washington. While presidents need to know what is going on around the world, they are completely incapable of processing that volume of raw information. Instead, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and the other agencies under them, pre-processes the information, drawing on analysts with deep expertise and knowledge about different parts of the world to decide the importance and meaning of the information. They then decide what it is that the president needs to know that day and can provide the president with the context he needs to make sense of that information. This process drastically simplifies the president's foreign policy and national security decision making.

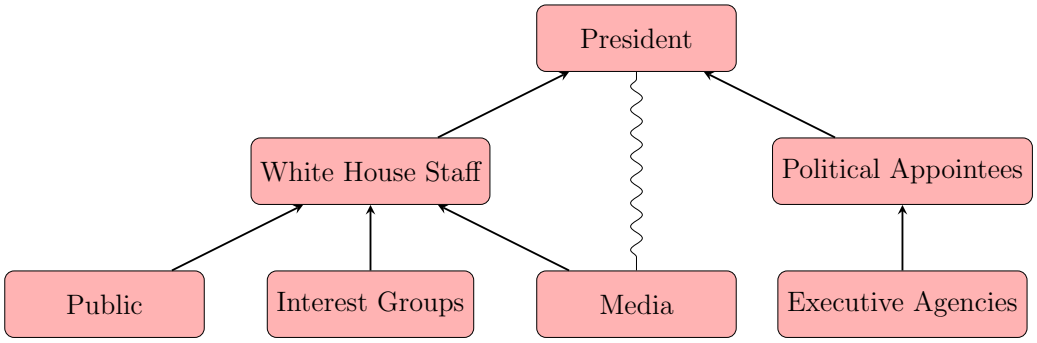
Yet that same process can also produce blind spots and errors in the president's decision making. In particular, while the PDB is shaped by expert assessments of the urgency of world events, it is also tailored to individual presidential interests (Savage 2016). Most days, the amount of time the pres-

ident devotes to national security is only an hour or so.[4] In this time period, the briefer has to cover information on all the pertinent situations around the world, but by including the president's interests as a prioritizing factor, they may decide not to include an emerging situation somewhere the president is not interested in. Eventually, this de-prioritization can grow into an emergency that catches a president off guard. Just as the PDB filters information to the point where he can deal with it, it can also filter it to the point where he is missing out on important information that he needs until it is too late. This creates a kind of filter failure that is a hazard of information pre-processing.

The president sits at the apex of a pyramid of people who pre-process information for him. At the base of the pyramid are many of the sources of information: the media, executive branch agencies, the public, interest groups, Congress, the courts. These actors all provide the president with information either through reports or their direct actions, representing the first stage of information pre-processing. The public, courts, and Congress pre-process information for the president by virtue of their independent actions. For example, the president can learn about a policy area and whether he should pay it attention by whether his co-partisans who control Congress take up the issue. Executive branch agencies and interest groups can provide information pre-processing by writing reports and holding meetings with members of the intermediate level of the pre-processing pyramid. These preliminary pre-processors have subject area expertise and can not only winnow informa-

[4]Of course, this changes during and after an emergency.

Figure 2.2: Paths of Information Pre-Processing



tion down to what is important, but also provide a layer of interpretation and information prioritization. This information is still too abundant to be of use to the president. It requires still more pre-processing.

The next stage, situated in between these sources of information and the president, is an intermediate stage. This stage is filled with people the president has selected to represent him, advise him, and look out for his policy agenda and political interests, such as appointees in executive branch agencies and White House employees. Particularly important are the White House chief of staff and the other members of the president's senior staff. These people are critical gatekeepers for presidential attention and information processing. They are his confidants and sounding boards, as well as his most trusted sources of information (Witherspoon 1991; Kernell and Popkin 1986). They help him make sense of the political environment, such as what the president can expect from Congress given the number of seats that the party holds or what his approval rating might mean for his political capital. They can also help process more policy specific information, taking meetings with people,

or process reports created by the initial stage of information processors and process it for how it fits in with the president's priorities and preferences. If the information fits with the president's priorities and preferences, then that information is more likely to make it to the president, and if it does not, then the president is unlikely to ever see it (Witherspoon 1991).

Every president has had three or four staff members whose input on policy as rivaled or even exceeded the influence held by members of the president's cabinet (Kernell and Popkin 1986). They are always on hand, always ready to help the president with a difficult decision. The relationship that they develop with him is critical to their ability to help him process information and deal with the demands of the job (Witherspoon 1991). Over time, they learn to read his moods and his state of mind, knowing when the president has made a hasty decision that if they implemented, he would come to regret and when the president has made up his mind—and right or wrong—they have to deal with the decision (Kernell and Popkin 1986). The president's chief of staff is a particularly important figure in presidential pre-processing because in most White Houses, he controls access to the president and is a critical gatekeeper of information that reaches the president (Kernell and Popkin 1986). An effective chief of staff can do a great deal to lighten the cognitive burden on presidents, but they can also, either accidentally or intentionally, prevent the president from getting all the information that he might need, leading to decision making errors.

Some parts of the media can bypass the intermediate pre-processing

stage. Presidents, in general, follow the news media quite closely. The media can provide the president a sense of how the public is reacting to political events. Sources that the president trusts, like *The New York Time* or *The Wall Street Journal*, or prominent journalists, like Peter Baker or Tim Russert. In the midst of the Vietnam War, President Lyndon Johnson, while watching a special report by Walter Cronkite on the Tet Offensive, reportedly turned to aides and said, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." The media also provide information directly to the president through investigative reporting. These reports can uncover policy problems that the president and his pre-processors have missed. But not all media goes directly to the president by passing the intermediate level of pre-processing. The media provides information of a much larger range of issues and opinions then the president can attend. This information still has the ability to inform presidential decision making when it is picked up by the intermediate level. Consequently, the media has the unique ability directly supply the president with information, but also provide information to intermediate level pre-processors.

Information pre-processing has many benefits. One benefit is that it provides a massive amount of information winnowing for the president. Presidents are expected to pay attention to, and be knowledgeable of, major policy developments in all policy areas. That is a massive undertaking for any institution, let alone one where the ultimate decisions rest in the hands of one person. Pre-processing allows for information to be prioritized by people with expert policy knowledge and expert knowledge of both presidential priorities

and preferences. Another benefit of pre-processing is that it allows for information to "compete" for attention. In a universe where the decision maker is the only information processor, once a piece of information has been discarded, it will likely stay there until the situation changes enough to make the policy area an exigent focus. In a pre-processing universe, the decision-making environment gets populated with sub-level decision makers, each of whom can become a champion for information that they deem important. For example, an interest group whose focus is the environment can try to meet repeatedly with different intermediate-level processors to try and find one who will take up the cause and bring the information to the next level of decision-making. Pre-processing can lengthen the time from information generation to final decision, but it can also increase probability that the information isn't discarded early in the decision-making process.

Information pre-processing does, however, have a number of weaknesses. One of the common threads in the principal-agent literature is the risk of bureaucratic drift. Bureaucratic drift is the idea that implementing agencies enact policy that is different from the intent of the enacting legislature (McCubbins, Noll and Weingast 1987). In the agency control literature, scholars consider how principals can incentivize their agents to maintain their intent or sanction them if there is drift from the principal's intent (Cook and Wood 1989; Horn and Shepsle 1989; Golden 2000; Moe 1989; Waterman and Meier 1998; Weingast 1984; Wilson 1989; Wood and Waterman 1994). This can also be a potential problem in information pre-processing, as pre-processing is a form of

delegation. The risk is that the information that is ultimately provided to the president is not reflective of his, the ultimate decision maker's priorities, but rather the priorities of the pre-processors. One potential solution for this rests with the intermediate level of pre-processors. They can correct for preference drift from the level below before information reaches the president. Alternatively, if the preference drift is in the intermediate level, presidents should be able to correct it rapidly, as intermediate level pre-processors, by and large, serve at the pleasure of the president. Unlike preliminary processors, whether they are bureaucrats with career protections or members of Congress, an intermediate level pre-processor whose preferences diverge from the president's is gone before much damage to the president's agenda can occur.

Another weakness of pre-processing produces similar results as the first, but the weakness is less intentional and more accidental. In the case of information processing drift, individual preferences cause intentional provision information that is out of line with presidential priorities. The less insidious version comes from the fact that pre-processors are just as subject cognitive and emotional limitations as presidents. This can cause them to ignore information or make errors in interpretation. Cognitive and emotional limitations at the lower levels of information processing can have disastrous consequences for presidential decision-making, as errors get magnified as they move up the pyramid of information processing.

Despite the very real weaknesses of pre-processing, it is a necessary component of presidential decision-making. Presidents can't process raw informa-

tion themselves, so they need to rely on a vast network of people under them to process information and make decisions. The weaknesses of pre-processing are a large part of why the president is a disproportionate information processor.

Individual presidents have different preferences about how much they want information to be pre-processed. Some presidents want information highly distilled before it gets to them, while others want briefing books full of information on a range of topics. For example, presidents have had different preferences regarding the President's Daily Briefing. President Clinton was known for wanting a written briefing only, where as President G. W. Bush wanted an in-person briefing; President Obama wanted both written and in-person briefings, and President Trump is known for wanting in-person briefings only once a week and single-page briefing memos (Bush 2016; Healey 2017). This difference reflects presidential personality and cognitive style more than anything else, but it can have significant consequences for decision-making. A president who prefers less pre-processing might be able to make a decision that is more in-line with his preferences, but due to the added time on the policy area, might ignore other problems, creating an overall more punctuated decision-making environment, while a president who prefers more pre-processing may make more errors in which policy options to pursue, but they may also be able to tackle more policy areas, as they can move swiftly from one topic to the next.

One thing that is so interesting about presidential information processing is that, while the presidential attention space is very limited, it is almost

always diverse. Even when there are huge crises in the political and policy world, such as in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the agenda does not shrink to only those topics; other policy areas stay on the agenda, though in a diminished quantity. Presidential policy selection is complex, even in the constraints of the limited attention space.

2.3.2 Serial Processing

The final aspect that makes the president a disproportionate information processor is the fact that he is a serial processor. Serial processing is the way that an individual makes decisions — focusing on one issue at a time (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Simon 1983). When a serial processor has to make a number of decisions, they have to first decide the order in which they will deal with the issues. After priorities are set out, then they work on the first issues until it is complete and they can move on to the next. That process forms the basis of presidential decision making.

Contrasted with serial processing is parallel processing. Parallel processing allows for separating tasks into their sub-parts and allocating different sub-parts to specialized units, allowing them to be handled simultaneously (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Simon 1983). Organizations allow for parallel processing, as their substructures, such as committees in the case of Congress or agencies in the case of the executive branch, allow for division of labor. Baumgartner and Jones (2005) illustrate this point when they talk about how the Postal Service is going to deliver mail no matter what the Department of

Energy is doing. These sub-structures ease the burdens of information processing for the system as a whole.

In the presidency, the advisors represent that important intermediate level of pre-processing that helps the president to cope with his serial processing nature. The relationship the president has with pre-processors is important; those who can speak with honesty and candor will provide the president with more information than those who are afraid for their own positions and power if they tell him something he doesn't want to hear. This relationship between presidents and advisors has a significant effect on the information that reaches the president and his ability to process information.

However, pre-processing does not change the fact that decisions from the executive branch ultimately have to be signed off by the president. The presidency is a serial processing institution. The ability of the president to focus on only one thing at a time has consequences for his ability to handle information and make decisions about attention allocation. By being a primarily serial processor, the president must prioritize extensively. A great deal of the presidents energy must be spent on deciding what issues to pay attention to and to update that list as information about the world and policy problems change. Other institutions are able to prioritize more long term; setting out plans for months in advance and rarely needing to drastically adjust the priorities based on current events. The presidency is an institution in which a plan for the week can be set out, but events can force it to be set aside by 10:01 on Monday morning. This means that the president regularly has to evaluate his

priorities and adjust in accordance to the changing world.

Additionally, the serial processing nature of the presidency also has an effect on decision-making because it creates a bottleneck. The president is ultimately responsible for the outcomes of all decisions. This means that all major decisions need to go before the president. Because he can only focus on one at a time, it creates a situation where information processing slows down and a new issue cannot receive the president's attention until he is done with the previous issue. This slowdown has significant consequences for decision-making and information processing.

Yet, individuals and organizations are not completely dominated by their primary type of information processing. Individuals are capable of parallel processing to a limited extent, but as the complexity of the task increases, individuals are forced to return to serial processing of tasks and information. Additionally, organizations are not capable of parallel processing forever. At some point, an organization must switch to serial processing to decide the broader organizational agenda. We see this in Congress on the floors of the House and Senate. In these chambers, the committee structure allow for policy area specialization and division of labor, but ultimately the leadership must make decisions about the order with which to bring issues to the floor, as voting on the floor requires Congress to process issues one at a time.

2.4 Individual Differences and Presidential Style: Other Psychological Approaches to Understanding the Presidency

Disproportionate information processing is not the only consideration at play when trying to understand presidential decision making. The presidency literature has used a number of different psychological approaches and frames to understand the man in the office. While these studies have largely focused on presidential character in order to uncover what makes a president successful, they offer useful insights into the way presidents think and make decisions, by considering different president's cognitive and organizational styles. Each of these psychologically driven characteristics, though not at the center of this study, are important to consider, particularity as they shape how we have tried to understand presidential decision making in the past.

Yet, studying the cognitive and organizational styles of presidents can't be the end point for presidency scholars. Just as the field of psychology moved from the study of individual cases to general phenomena (Cronbach, Rajaratnam and Gleser 1963) and organizational theory has move toward a behavioral theory (Cyert, March et al. 1963), so too must the study of presidential decision-making. The work of this dissertation is a part of that leap, as instead of trying to explain and understand the differences between individual presidents, we are trying to understand the ways that all presidents tackle the cognitively-complex job of the presidency. However, the past scholarship on the presidency is worthy of review as these characteristics form the basis of

the cognitive and emotional limitations that are at the center of the general framework of disproportionate information processing.

2.4.1 Cognitive Styles

One thing that is noteworthy for this theory of presidential information processing is how much the institution of the presidency is influenced by the serial processing capacity of the individual who is president. While the president does have access to staff and others who pre-process information for him, the president is responsible for the final decision more than almost any other political actor in government. This means that he needs to be able to think clearly and make decisions quickly and decisively. In addition to the substantive decisions presidents must make, they must also constantly evaluate the organization of their pre-processors, deciding again and again whether the structure is working and if the particular individuals closest to them are helping with the decision making process. These constant decisions make the president much more of a serial processor than any other political institution.

The serial processing nature of the presidency has significant consequences for decision-making. One such consequence is that the capacity of the presidency is strongly shaped by the cognitive capacity of the individual in the office. Officeholders always shape their institutions, but in larger institutions, the institutional capacity is shaped by the sum of the actors, rather than being dependent on one actor. In the presidency, the institution is shaped by the cognitive capacity and the orientation the individual in the office has towards the

job. Differences in these outlooks and abilities have significant consequences for how the institution operates and interacts with other institutions and political actors. Additionally, the abilities of the individual have a substantial impact on how they handle the demands of the task, particularly how they process information. Greenstein's seminal work on presidential character examines how differences in characteristics, such as public communication style, organizational capacity, political skill, vision, cognitive style, and emotional intelligence shape presidents and reshape the presidency each time there is a change in officeholder (Greenstein 2009).

Greenstein highlights two characteristics in particular that have an impact on presidential information processing: cognitive style and emotional intelligence. In Greenstein's own words, cognitive style is " '[the way] the president processes the Niagara of advice and information that comes his way" (2009). Emotional intelligence can best be understood as how president's manage their emotions (Greenstein 2009); does a president channel a defeat into productive energy that propels him forward or is it a stumbling block, one which makes it more difficult to get things done in the future? As we have discussed extensively, presidents are overloaded with information and faced with many challenges that stand in the way of accomplishing their goals. How they handle that overload and those challenges speaks to their intellect, temperament, and emotional capacity. A president who is cognizant of the challenges of processing information and sets up an intentional organization around him in order to try to get the best help he can and can channel his emotions into

a productive way is going to make much different decisions than a president who is subject to emotional highs and lows or one who distrusts the information coming from those around him. The information processing capacity and decision making ability of presidents are strongly shaped by the psychological characteristics set out by Greenstein.

Another way scholars have tried to understand presidential character and its affect on the presidency is through the categorizations of Barber (1992). He created a scheme of four categories that represent the different types of outlooks the president can have towards the office and are created by looking at two dimensions, energy level and affect.[5] These categories attempt to understand the the orientation and enthusiasm that define a president's character in order to determine which characteristics make for "successful" presidencies. Success in the White House is a nebulous concept, but Barber's typology does provide a context to think about presidential character and approach to the job, and when combined with the characteristics from Greenstein's work, can shed some light on how individuals might process information differently.

These characteristics, emotional intelligence and cognitive styles—both from Greenstein's work (2009) — and orientations towards the office—from the work of Barber (1992)— are particularly significant for understanding disproportionate information processing. They provide significant insight in to the kind of cognitive and emotional limitations that affect an individual president

[5]For more information on what defines the four categories, read Barber's book "The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House" (1992).

and shed light on they way their individual decision-making process might work. For example, President Nixon was the kind of individual who thought all the time and soaked up information, but struggled with what to do with the information he had —an indication of both his cognitive style and emotional intelligence (Greenstein 2009). However, he was a compulsive president, according to Barber, obsessed with his own power and the successes and failures (1992). These characteristics limited his ability to process information because the obsession with power and success exacerbated the emotional limitations that might have allowed the vast amount of information that is absorbed from being integrated and processed proportionally.

Another type of president is one like Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan had a much weaker grasp of logic and did not devote much energy to acquiring new information, instead delegating it to his staff and advisors. Instead, he used his strong emotional intelligence to appear as if he had a grasp of what was going on around him (Greenstein 2009). Yet when combined with his compliant character type, his need to be adored, and his reactive rather than proactive nature, it is reasonable to expect that his character had an effect on how he processed information preventing him from making decisions that would advance his interests. A president who only reacts and tries to acquire the minimum amount of information, while delegating power to others, makes decisions and handles information in a much different way than those who are detail oriented.

These characteristics, regardless of particular character or personality

type, shape the president's information processing capacity, and thus the capacity of the presidency. The institution of the presidency is transformed each time a new person takes office because of the change in character and cognitive capacity of the individual.

2.4.2 Organizational Styles

A second way the individual in the office reshapes the presidency is through their organizational structures. The way that presidents have organized the White House has varied considerably over time (Burke 2009; Greenstein 2009; Hult and Walcott 2009). However, Hess points to four characteristics in organization of the modern presidency (2012). The first characteristic is the sheer growth in the number of people in the White House. Prior to Franklin D. Roosevelt, presidents had a small handful of aides (Burke 2000), but the modern presidency has grown significantly in both size and complexity (Allison 1971; Janis 1972; Johnson 1974). A second characteristic of the modern presidency is a distrust of the permanent government. Rather than rely on bureaucrats to create policy proposals, the presidency has moved towards creating offices within the White House, staffed with people loyal to the president to tackle policy, such as creating a drugs czar rather than relying on bureaucrats with in the Drug Enforcement Agency (Hess and Pfiffner 2012). This has created fragmentation in the policy process, making it more difficult for those who create policy and those who implement it to share information with each other. A third characteristic is the rising influence of White House

staff and the declining influence of the cabinet. This creates problems similar to those created by the rise in functional policy offices in the White House. As policy making occurs more and more in the president's own staff and he listens to them more than to the agencies and their heads, there is an increasing disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. Finally, presidential staff have increasingly become tasked with insuring representation for special groups. Although this started benignly under President Truman as a way to insure some voice for those who would not otherwise be represented in executive branch decision making, it eventually grew until almost every interest had a voice, making it difficult to filter all opinions (Hess and Pfiffner 2012). All of these characteristics and changes have had important effects on the institution of the presidency, as they shape the way decisions are made and whose perspectives are heard in the decision making process.

A central way we have thought about the organization of the White House is in regards to whose voices are heard by the president. Each president creates a White House structure to suit his preferences about how he wants to be advised and the relationships he wants his advisors to have with each other. The relationship that White House aides have with each other and the president reflects the president's "needs and fears, his assumptions about people, and why he manages them as he does" (Johnson 1974). Richard Johnson's scholarship highlights three main types of White House structures: competitive, formalistic, and collegial. In a competitive White House, there are a small band of top staffers who compete to be assigned tasks by the president.

Their duties often overlap and the president contributes to the competitive environment by fostering the rivalries between staffers to reinforce their loyalty to him (Johnson 1974; Burke 2009). This style of White House is mostly attributed to the Franklin Roosevelt administration, but current trends in the Trump administration, such as a great deal of information leaking to the media from aides and loyalty to the president as one of the most important qualities, suggest that the competitive style may still be relevant in the contemporary presidency. The strength of a competitive White House is that it maximizes presidential control and favors the creation of policy solutions that are politically feasible (Johnson 1974; Burke 2009). The weakness is that the president has to spend a considerable amount of energy directing the competition in productive ways and controlling interpersonal relationships between staffers so as to create the competitive tension. Additionally, the competitive approach has the potential to drastically limit the information that gets to the president because individuals are incentivized to only pass along information that is desirable to the president. This could contribute to the disproportionate nature of information processing as vital information could be ignored by staffers and never make it to the president simply because it is information they think would upset him and risk falling into disfavor over.

In a formalistic environment, we see a great deal of delegation from the president to top staffers and a clearly delineated, hierarchical system through which information and advice reaches the president and tasks are assigned (Johnson 1974; Burke 2009). The formalistic White House can be thought of

as a pyramid with the president at the top and each rank of advisors making up one of the supporting levels below. When Johnson wrote about this style, he highlighted the Eisenhower administration, and its leader's experience in the military, with its structure, as a prime example of the formalistic White House, but we have also seen this structure in the administration of George W. Bush. In the case of G.W. Bush, his experience in the corporate world formed his vision of how the White House should be organized. The strength of the formalistic White House is that it allows for broad search about the nature of policy problems and solutions, as lower levels of the structure could devote their attention to search. However, in this structure there is a greater risk of information getting distorted as it moves up the pyramid of the organization (Johnson 1974; Burke 2009). The greater the number of levels that information has to pass through before it reaches the president, the more likely the information is to either be dismissed as unimportant before it ever reaches the president or for the information to be distorted, as if through a game of "telephone" and be unhelpful for solving the real policy problem.

Finally, in a collegial environment the president is supported by a small group of staffers, just like in the competitive environment, only instead of being pitted against one another; they are encouraged to work together. Just as the formalistic environment could be imagined as a pyramid, the collegial environment could be understood as a wagon wheel, where the president is at the center and each advisor is a spoke outward (Johnson 1974; Burke 2009). We see this style in the Ford administration, as an attempt to heal the White

House following the Nixon administration. We also see this style in the Obama administration, where the president surrounded himself with a small team of confidants who helped him process policy and make decisions.

The strength of the collegial style is that it allows information to have more routes to the president, as each of that small group of advisors is a potential access point for information. This style also allows for teamwork and collaboration on an idea. All of these are excellent points when there is a diversity of viewpoints. However, this style can have two main weaknesses. One weakness is when the small group all thinks the same way. This can cause an echo-chamber effect that does not allow the penetration of new ideas or information (Johnson 1974; Janis 1972). This can exacerbate the information processing problem because the more closed off a group is, the more likely it is to ignore vital information about the state of a problem engaging in group-think, which can lead to emergencies down the road. A second weakness with the collegial White House is that it can allow too much access to the president. One of the key reasons for a president to have a good staff is so that they can pre-process information and reduce the cognitive strain on the president. A collegial administration with a spokes of the wheel configuration has the potential to not sufficiently process information and overtax the president's resources to get to the crux of an issue, particularly when multiple advisors are competing for the president's attention.

Presidents structure their White Houses to reflect both their needs and their characters. In a healthy White House, presidents whose cognitive

abilities are not their strength need aides that they can rely on to process information for them more fully. Presidents who like to acquire information directly need staff around them to debate ideas and make sure that they are not being blinded by their own cognitive and emotional limitations (Greenstein 2009). Additionally, presidents have needs beyond direct advising that have consequences for their organizational structures. Emotional support or the need to generate support in Congress and the public can shape decisions that presidents make about how to structure and populate their staffs (George 1980). The president's choice of organization has consequences for his ability to process information and make decisions.

2.5 Consequences of the New Approach of Presidential Decision Making

The new approach to presidential decision making, set out in this chapter, highlights the many ways in which presidential decision making may be affected by cognitive and emotional limitations and result in disproportionate information processing. Many aspects of the institution of the presidency, such as staff structures and serial processing, have consequences for the ways in which presidents prioritize and make decisions. By exploring a theory of presidential information processing, we gain significant insights to president's decision-making processes.

The process of making decisions for an institution with a central focus like the president is far more complicated than it is for many other institutions.

Presidents are constantly pressed to pay attention to all policy issues and must prioritize extensively and re-prioritize regularly to make the best use of their most scarce resources, their time and attention. By understanding presidential decision-making as a series of stages, where presidents must first sort through information, decide on issue prioritization, followed by a decision on what tool and strategy to use to tackle the selected issue, all resulting in the policy action the president takes, we gain a great deal of insight into the complexity of presidential decision making. Other institutions are faced with similar prioritization challenges, but have the ability to divide the decisions across a much wider range of decision makers than exist in the presidency.

In the subsequent chapters, we will examine the different stages of presidential decision making, focusing on how presidents make decisions and trade-offs about policy issues and policy tools, before considering how they come together, but it is first important to recognize the contributions of this study. Never before has it been possible to see the policy areas that presidents have been paying attention to, nor have we been able to measure how presidents make trade-offs between different policy areas. Nor have we studied, in a comprehensive fashion, the range of policy tools that the president has at his disposal and examine the decisions the president makes regarding whether to propose policy, shape it prior to implementation, or take unilateral action. Finally, this study brings together policy areas and tools to learn how these two types of decisions interact with each other, getting a sense of how particular policy areas can limit the use of tools and how the limits of certain tools

can point to certain policy areas. This dissertation represents steps forward for a number of areas of study in the presidency.

Presidential decision-making has significant consequences for policy and politics in our everyday lives. By trying to understand the decisions that presidents make and how they make them, we can gain significant insight into why some issues end up on the agenda and why others stay off. Additionally, we can begin to consider questions of institutional capacity and how institutional design affects the information processing capacity. All of which offer new insights into the presidency and the policy process.

In the next chapter, we will examine presidential decision making, specifically the decisions that presidents make about what policy areas to pay attention to and how they make trade-offs between policy areas. Presidents rely on the information, both about the expectations associated with the job, but also, from the world around them in order to make decisions about what to pay attention to. By trying to understand what presidents pay attention to and why they pay attention to those issues, we can learn a great deal about the presidential decision making process.

Chapter 3

Data and Methods

Each year in early November, a team of speech writers meets with the president to begin developing a list list of policy areas that will appear in the upcoming State of the Union address. Over the following weeks and months, the policy priorities and language are honed to fit with events as they happen in the world; a mass shooting may increase the length of the section devoted to gun control or an earthquake in Haiti may direct more attention to the need for foreign aid. The final speech reflects the president's main policy priorities, both in general and in response to specific events. But once a State of the Union is over, there is great deal of time until the next one. Presidential policy attention is constantly shifting and requires measurement from many angles at many points in time throughout the year. In this chapter, I will detail the data and methodology that allows for better analysis of presidential decision-making and trade-offs.

3.1 Presidential Agendas in the Past

Presidential decision-making has long been a part of the discussion of the policy process. Many of these studies focus on the presidential agenda.

The agenda is the "the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials are paying some serious attention" (Kingdon 1984, p.2). The president's agenda is a direct result of the decisions that he makes and what he finds important to prioritize. His agenda has broader significance in the policy process literature because many scholars have recognized that the president has the ability to attract attention to issues and set the agenda of other actors (Kingdon 1984; Light 1991; Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Beckmann 2010).

Before we introduce the new data, it is necessary to consider what past studies of presidential policymaking have done and why they are insufficient to understand presidential decision-making. One category of scholarship considers the presidential policy agenda and the factors that explain its composition. One of the most prominent studies of presidential policy decision-making is Paul Light's book *The President's Agenda*. In this book, Light examines the president's domestic policy agenda from Kennedy to Clinton, using State of the Union addresses to highlight those policy priorities that were on the presidents agenda (Light 1991). Light justifies the use of the State of the Union through interviews with presidential staff members who stated that although the speech includes a "laundry list of topics, it will contain the president's top priorities and other actors in Washington will be listening to the speech to ascertain those priorities. This book led to a number of other studies, including Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake (2005), who extend this study out into the full Public Papers of the Presidency and developed a policy typology of short- and long-term priorities paired with important and unimportant poli-

cies to conclude that presidential policy agendas are a function of presidential environment. These studies are insufficient on their own as a way to understand presidential decision-making because they take a very overarching view of presidential agenda without any distinctions between the types of actions that presidents take to get involved in policy making.

Other scholars consider how the presidential agenda shapes the agenda of other political institutions (Edwards and Wood 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004; Peake 2001; Peake and Eshbaugh-Soha 2008; Rutledge and Larsen-Price 2014). Inter-institutional agenda setting dynamics are quite interesting as they give some significant insight into the way the presidency, Congress, and, in some studies, the media interact and have an effect on each others' agenda. This is important because policy change is only possible when the issue gets on to the agenda in the first place and the person who is able to bring others' attention to the issue is much more likely to be able to set problem definition and initial terms of debate (Kingdon 1984; Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). One of the most foundational studies of this issue is Edward and Wood's article "Who influences whom," in which they look at a range of important policy issues, both foreign and domestic, and consider the relationship between the president, Congress, and the media and find that the president largely dominates the agenda-setting relationships, but his influence is not absolute; in some areas the media also has significant agenda setting role (1999). These studies offer an interesting insight to presidential decision making about policy, but they are incomplete because they fail to uncover the true range of policy

areas that presidents pay attention to and the trade-offs that presidents have to make between policy areas every day.

Finally, there are a number of scholars who consider take a very different approach to presidential decision-making. These scholars examine the different policy tools that the president has at his disposal to participate in the policy process. Some consider how presidents use speeches to communicate and, perhaps, persuade the public (Whitford and Yates 2009; Edwards 2006; Eshbaugh-Soha 2010). Others examine tools the president has at his disposal for direct action, such as executive orders, memoranda, signing statements, and proclamations (Cooper 2014; Gitterman 2017). These studies all study the way a president uses a single policy tool to great effect; to better understand how these tools operate in the political system as a way of understanding the presidency.

Those studies that examine only policy tools are incomplete because they don't offer us any insight into how presidents must routinely match policy areas with policy tool. Not every policy area can be the subject of every tool; for example, the television networks and their news directors would be highly put out and angry with the administration if they preempted prime time programing to do a major televised address to the nation on a relatively minor policy area, like patents and copyright protections. Those studies that look at policy tools in isolation miss the nuances of how the tools might be used differently across different policy areas.

One study that takes presidential tool choice and policy area seriously

is Heather Larsen Price's study of presidential policy canalization, which examines how presidents channel their attention though different policy tools depending on the policy area (2012). She finds that presidents prioritize some policy areas more via some policy tools than others and that there is often a coordinated effort across policy tools to attack a particular issue. This study takes the differences between policy tools and policy areas seriously and sets up a framework for understanding how presidents might use one tool over another. Larsen Price's work inspired this dissertation, in part because it raised questions about how scholars might be missing important aspects of the presidency by studying all actions in the same way. By urging scholars to quantitatively measure and study the ways that presidents channel different policy areas through different types of action, Larsen Price made an original and significant contribution to the study of the presidency.

This dissertation goes much farther by considering what shapes presidential decisions about what policy areas to pay attention to and how presidents select what policy strategies they will use to make those decisions, while considering the full range of policy areas and a wider range of tools. I do this in order to understand how presidents, whose cognitive and emotional limitations shape the way that they process information and direct their limited attention, try to achieve their policy goals. To do this I use a simplified version of the Policy Agendas Project (PAP) coding scheme to study presidential decision-making across all policy areas and I use 10 different policy tool datasets, with over 27,022 observations, clustered into three main pol-

icy strategies, to consider presidential policy decision-making and information processing.

3.2 A New Data Approach: Policy Areas

This project relies heavily on the U.S. Policy Agendas Project (PAP) (https://www.comparativeagendas.net/us).[1] The Project began in 1993 as a way to systematically measure government attention within and across specific policy areas and time, becoming the founding project of the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP) network. The Policy Agendas Project uses a consistent policy content coding scheme. This coding scheme allows for policy attention to be compared across topic, and institution, as well as across time. The Policy Agendas Project's major and minor topic codes identify the main or general topic area (e.g., 1 = Macroeconomics) and then identify the minor or specific subtopic area (e.g., 105 = National Budget and Debt). There are 20 major topics and 213 minor topics in the PAP coding scheme. The methodology used by the Policy Agendas Project to assign major and minor topics to observations is straightforward and methodical. All data is coded by hand, with each observation being assigned codes by two coders who work independently. Following coding, the two codes are reconciled to make a final

[1]Those data that are attributed to the Policy Agendas Project used in this dissertation, State of the Union and Executive Orders, were originally collected by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, with the support of National Science Foundation grant numbers SBR 9320922 and 0111611, and were distributed through the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin. Neither NSF nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analysis reported here.

determination. The Project strives for 90% agreement on major topic and 80% on minor topic following reconciliation. The new datasets created for this dissertation were coded in a similar, though slightly abbreviated way. One coder assigned a code to every observation, while a second coder independently coded a 10% sample of each dataset. These observations were than reconciled to the same standards as the Policy Agendas Project.

3.2.1 Creating a Macro Topic Scheme for Presidential Attention

The analysis in this dissertation uses the 20 major topics of the PAP to create a five topic macro-level coding scheme. To do the kind of analysis in this project, where we are looking at all policy areas over a 34-year period, we needed to simplify the number of categories; examining all 20 topics across time is too complex to analyze. As such, I created a coding scheme of five macro-topics: economics, international affairs, government operations, social welfare, and other domestic policy. I devised these categories by first determining which of the 20 major topics made up the largest parts of the presidents agenda, based on all the observations in this dissertation. I found that presidents pay the most attention to major topics: macroeconomics (13.8%), international affairs (12.9%), government operations (10.9%), defense (10.5%), and health (9.1%). I used these as the base of my macro-topic scheme, combining international affairs with defense, and matching the remaining smaller policy areas with the dominant major topics in a way that seemed sensible, and creating a remainder category, other domestic policy, for those major topics that did not fit with

Table 3.1: Major Topics Organized by Macro-Topic

Dissertation Macro-topic	PAP Major-topic
Economy	Macroeconomics (1)
	Labor and Employment (5)
	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce (15)
International Affairs	Immigration (9)
	Defense (16)
	Foreign Trade (18)
	International Affairs and Foreign Aid (19)
Government Operations	Government Operations (20)
Social Welfare	Health (3)
	Education (6)
	Social Welfare (13)
	Community Development and Housing Issues (14)
Other Domestic Policy	Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties (2)
	Agriculture (4)
	Environment (7)
	Energy (8)
	Transportation (10)
	Law, Crime, and Family Issues (12)
	Space, Science, Technology, and Communications (17)
	Public Lands and Water Management (21)

the four dominant policy domains. Table 3.1 outlines which of the PAP major topics are included in which macro-topic in this dissertation.

What we see when we move from 20 major topics to 5 macro-topics is a condensation, but not a distortion, of presidential attention. When we look at Figure 3.1, which shows the State of the Union address over time and all 20 macro ordered according to how the fit into macro topics, and then we look at Figure 3.2, which shows the State of the Union address in the 5 macro topics, we are able to see patterns much more easily. In Figure 3.1, the only easily discernible trend is in the substantial part of the agenda that macroeconomics

Figure 3.1: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in the State of the Union, Major Topics

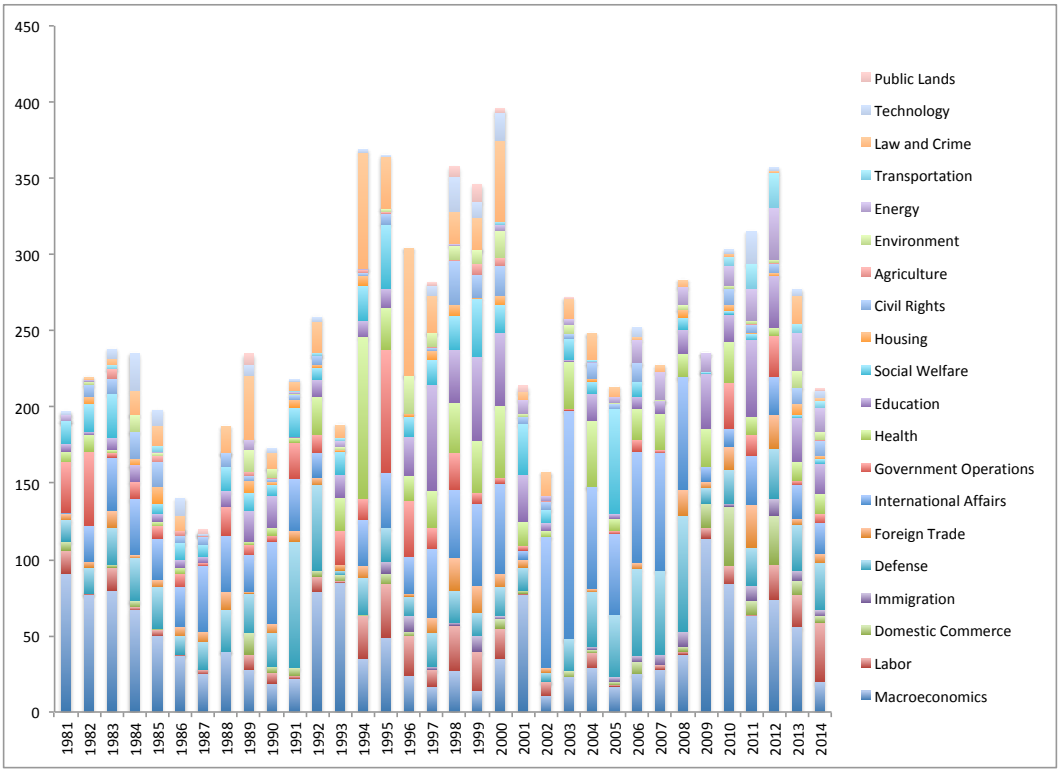
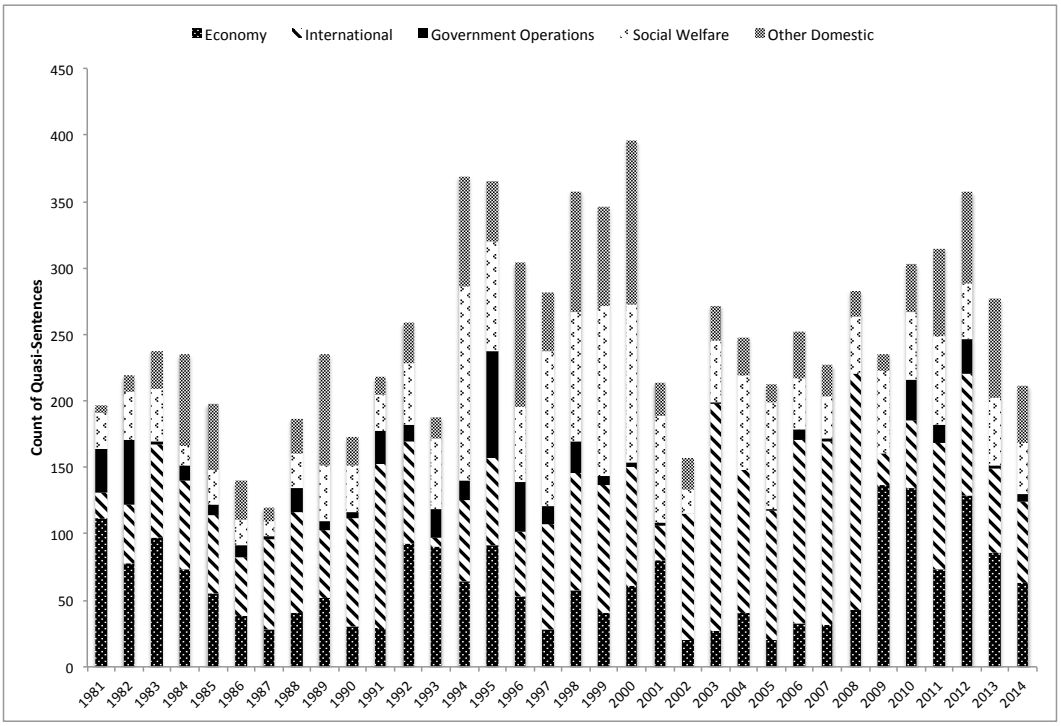


Figure 3.2: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in the State of the Union, Macro Topics



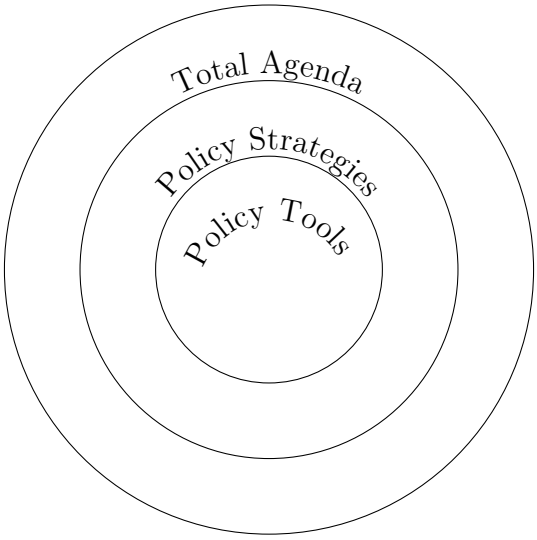
has had over time. In Figure 3.2, it is much easier to see the way international affairs has been a substantial part of the address, and the way social welfare has risen and fallen on the agenda, in addition to the regularity of economic policy. This simplification is quite useful for our study moving forward.

3.3 A New Data Approach: Policy Tools and Strategies

One of the struggles in past works of presidential policy making is exactly what level of the presidential agenda should be studied. There are three levels to the presidential agenda: the total policy agenda level, the policy strategy level, and the policy tool level. The policy tool level is made up of the individual types of action that the president can take to get involved in policy, such as give a State of the Union address, issue an executive order, or issue a veto threat. A policy tool is any type of action that a president takes to get involved in policy. The next level above policy tools is the policy strategy level. This level takes the individual policy tools and organizes them into the various general types of actions that a president can take, such as propose policy, shape policy, or make policy unilaterally. The final level collects up all of those strategies into one group, the sum total of all presidential actions. I call this level the total policy agenda. Each level of this structure builds upon each other level, so that they create a hierarchy where every tool rests within a strategy, and every strategy rests within the total agenda. Figure 3.3 is a visual representation of this relationship.

Each of these three levels allows us to analyze the president's policy ac-

Figure 3.3: Levels of Presidential Policy Agendas



tions in slightly different ways. Studying the total policy agenda level allows us to consider the amount of attention the president has to spend on policy. This is an important because the amount of time that the president has to spend on policy each day is finite, limited by the number of hours in the day and the need presidents have to devote time to other tasks. The amount of time that is devoted to policy varies over time and presidents in response to the urgency of policy problems and the influence of individual presidential character. Different presidents have different cognitive and emotional capacities, which allow them to devote different total amounts of attention to policy. Studying the total presidential agenda gives us some insights into the policy-making capacities of presidents.

The next level down is the policy strategy level. This level is made up of the three broad types of actions that presidents can take to get involved in the

policy process. Each type of action has a different effect on the policy-making process and thus different strengths and weaknesses when the president uses it. Studying the president's choice of policy strategy can answer questions about how presidents process information about their power and their environment and transform information into actions. This level also offers us a excellent view into the trade-offs that presidents make between power, attention, and discretion that are inherent in each of the strategies, which is why it is the main level used in this study.

The first strategy the president has at his disposal is the ability to propose policy. From the very beginning of the republic, presidents proposed policy ideas to Congress in hopes that the Congress would take up those ideas. The proposal strategy, and the tools that sit within this strategy, allow the president the ability to get involved in policy in a low-risk kind of way: the president introduces an idea into the policy debate, bringing attention to the policy area and a particular problem definition and solution, but works together with Congress and other political actors to bring the policy change to fruition. This process gives the strategy its greatest strength, the ability for the president to claim credit for the idea if all goes well, but also the ability to distance himself if the policy should be unpopular. This strategy is not without weaknesses, however. Just as the president can avoid blame, the Congress can completely ignore the president if they don't like the issue and want to take action on it. There is very little a president can do to persuade a reluctant Congress to take up an issue when they have decided they don't want to pay

attention to it.

The second strategy presidents have at their disposal is to shape policy in the later stage of the legislative process. In this strategy, presidents change policy outputs by communicating with Congress as they are trying to pass legislation or by giving instructions to the bureaucracy about how a newly passed law should be implemented. The shaping strategy gives the president the ability to make subtle changes to policy to bring it more in line with his personal preferences. The downside to the shaping strategy is two-fold: first, presidents can only use it in response to congressional action, which means that Congress had to take up a policy area that the president cared about in the first place, and two, the strategy is much riskier for the president than the others. Congress makes laws that the majority in each chamber is willing to support. The president getting involved in the end of the process and making changes to what Congress has done can be a really good way to anger them, causing the president to face policy challenges over that specific issue and a potentially reduced level of support from the House and Senate on future policy initiatives.

The third strategy presidents have to make policy is unilateral action. The presidency was designed with speed and responsiveness in mind. Because of this, the president was given the ability to make policy independently in a limited number of policy areas. Over time, Congress has delegated, both implicitly and explicitly, more policy-making authority to the president. These delegations have given the president the power to make policy unilaterally on

a wide range of policy areas. Unilateral action has a number of strengths for presidential policymaking. First, many of these unilateral action tools go unchallenged in Congress because of Congress' inability to overcome collective action problems. This means that when the president makes policy unilaterally, it can be really difficult for Congress to stop the policy change. The other strength of unilateral action is the immediate nature of policy change. In this strategy, the president merely has to take official action and policy changes in the way he desires, making the strategy low risk and high reward for presidents in the short term. This is not a perfect strategy, however. In the long term, unilateral action is much riskier. These actions have the force of law, but can be superseded by a new law or subsequent presidential order and they are vulnerable to court challenges. This means that just as easily as a president can make a unilateral action, he can see his policy legacy swept away. The characteristics of each of these three strategies, proposal, shaping, and unilateral action, make them a very interesting way to study presidential decisions-making, as the offer an insight into nuance, without getting lost in complexity.

The lowest and final level of presidential agendas is the policy tool agenda. As I said earlier, the policy tool level is made up of the individual actions that presidents can take to influence policy. In this study, the policy tool levels is made up of 10 policy tools: State of the Union addresses, budget messages, speeches to a joint session of Congress, press conference opening statements, major televised addresses to the nation, signing statements, veto

threats, executive orders, memoranda, and proclamations. I will describe each of these policy tools and how they fit in into the different policy strategies in a moment, but what is important to understand is that studying these individual tools can allow us to ask questions about the nuance of presidential action within the policy process. Yet, studying presidential activity at this level can be difficult, as this nuance and complexity can frustrate efforts to understand the general trends of presidential decision-making.

3.3.1 The Individual Policy Tools

The policy tools contained within this dissertation cover a wide range of presidential activities. Some of these activities have been studied extensively in the past, but others have received very little attention. This dissertation is going to focus primarily on the strategy level because it helps us to understand how it is that presidents process information into action in the kind of broad strokes that are useful for a first in-depth quantitative analysis. Yet, the individual tools are incredibly rich sources of information, which I think can be studied in greater detail in future work. For this project, I will describe each of the individual policy tools in this section. I have organized the individual tools by their policy strategy, which I will look at in more detail in Chapter 5.

The first strategy in this study is the proposal strategy. This strategy contains the State of the Union address, budget messages, speeches to a joint session of Congress, press conference opening statements, and major televised addresses to the nation. These tools offer presidents to the opportunity to

Table 3.2: Descriptive Statistics of Presidential Policy Tools (Total N=27,022)

Policy Tools	N=	Mean Obs. Per Year	Max Obs. (Year)	Min Obs. (Year)	Strategy
Budget Messages	34 Messages (4,088 quasi-sentences)	1	1	1	Proposal
Major Televised Speeches	110 speeches	3.2	12 (1991)	0 (Multiple)	Proposal
Press Conference Opening Statement	698 statements	20.5	42 (1994)	3 (1987)	Proposal
Speeches to a Joint Session of Congress	9 speeches (1,966 quasi-sentences)	0.26	1 (Multiple)	0 (Multiple)	Proposal
State of the Union	34 Speeches (10,195 quasi-sentences)	1	1	1	Proposal
Signing Statements	1,309 statements	38.5	95 (2000)	2 (Multiple)	Shaping
Veto Threats (1985-2014)	1,443 threats	42.4	118 (1997)	0 (Multiple)	Shaping
Executive Orders	1,398 orders	41.1	66 (2001)	20 (2013)	Unilateral
Presidential Memoranda	928 memoranda	27.3	53 (2000)	9 (Multiple)	Unilateral
Proclamations	4,410 proclamations	129.7	171 (1986)	72 (1981)	Unilateral

speak directly to different audiences and propose policy ideas for further policy decision-making.

The first of these tools is the State of the Union address. These are annual speeches that the president gives to a joint session of Congress and, since the late 1940s, has regularly been televised to communicate with the American people. Their transmission and audience have changed since the founding, but they grow out of a constitutional requirement that the president "give to the Congress information on the state of the union." Studies of presidential agenda setting have long focused on State of the Union. These speeches can be a laundry list containing almost every policy area that the president could possibly address. We see this in Figure 3.2, which shows that, even with some policy areas that reoccur frequently, such as economics and international affairs, there are other topics whose share of the speech varies from year to year, such as government operations.

The Policy Agendas Project collected these data (www.comparativeagendas.net/us). In 34 years, there have been 34 speeches with a total of 10,195 quasi-sentences. The speeches have varied considerably in length and complexity. The shortest of these speeches was Ronald Reagan's 1987 address, which had only 120 policy-containing quasi-sentences[2] and focused primarily on economics and international affairs. The longest speech was President Bill Cinton's 2000 address, which had 396 policy-containing quasi-sentences and devoted significant attention to all macro policy areas, except government operations. State of the Union addresses offer presidents the chance to speak to a national audience and set out a policy agenda for the year.

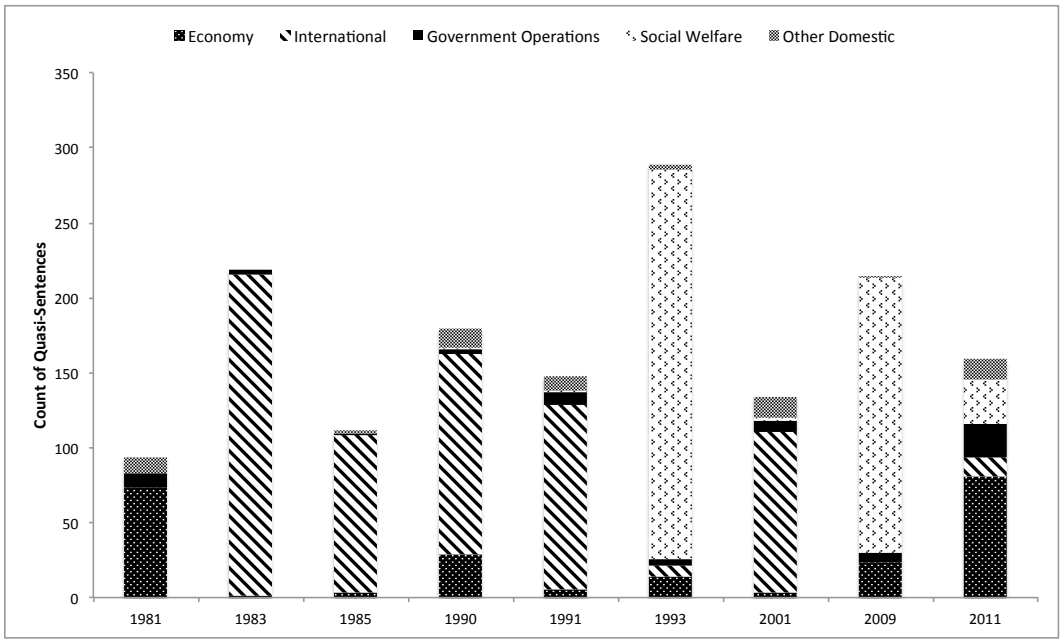
The next policy tool is the address to a joint session of Congress. In form, they look very similar to State of the Union addresses: they are speeches before Congress and are nationally televised. In fact, State of the Unions that are given by presidents in their first months in office are technically addresses to a joint session of Congress.[3] In function, these speeches are quite different. Instead of addressing a wide range of policy areas and occurring annually at the same time each year, these speeches focus on a specific policy concern and vary in their frequency and timing.

This dataset is original to this dissertation and was collected from

[2]Non-policy quasi-sentences in this and any other policy tool are excluded from this analysis.

[3]However, because these speeches behave like State of the Unions, I include them in that policy tool.

Figure 3.4: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Addresses to a Joint Session of Congress

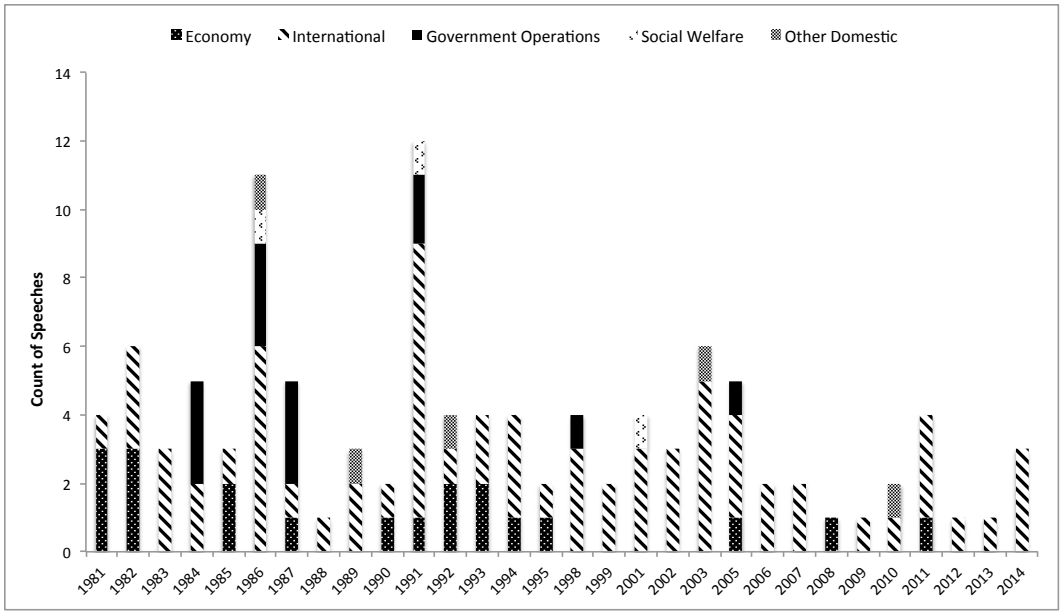


American Presidency Project website (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu). Presidents use addresses to a joint session of Congress rarely, with only 9 speeches in 34 years and are coded at the quasi-sentence level. As can be seen in Figure 3.4, these speeches tend to be slightly shorter then the State of the Union and focus on one or two topics intensely with a few mentions of other topics. The most common policy area for presidents to address Congress about is international affairs, which was the focus of the speeches in 1983, 1985, 1990, 1991, and 2001; social welfare, which was a focus in 1993 and 2009; and economics, which was the focus in 1981 and 2011.[4] This shows us that, unlike a State of the Union, which because of its laundry list qualities can be used to propose policy in any area, an address to a joint session of Congress can only be used sparingly, when there is a large problem or the president is very passionate about an issue.

The next tool presidents can use in the proposal strategy is the major televised address. Like addresses to a joint session of Congress, these are speeches in which the president focuses on one policy problem at a time. Just like the name of the tool suggest, these are televised and carried on all of the major networks, preempting the planned programing. Presidents use the tool sparingly, as to use it too often would risk upsetting the television networks

[4]The 2011 speech looks slightly different because of the way that President Obama talked about the economic recovery. He used the financial crisis to talk not just about economic solutions, but labor changes, transportation infrastructure projects to put people to work, changes in banking regulations, and government efficiency. Despite his varied language and policy solutions, the speech, as a whole, really was focused on finding a solution to the macroeconomic ills of the moment.

Figure 3.5: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Major Televised Speeches



and diluting the power of the tool. When the president goes in TV this way, it is treated as an important newsworthy event. If the president were to use it too often, in policy areas that were not sufficiently important as to warrant the urgency, the press would stop covering them and they would lose the impact, which is part of the reason the president uses them. In many ways, their function is similar to the addresses to a joint session of Congress, in that they offer the president the opportunity to appeal directly to the masses and offer proposals, explanations, and reassurance in the face of extraordinary events.

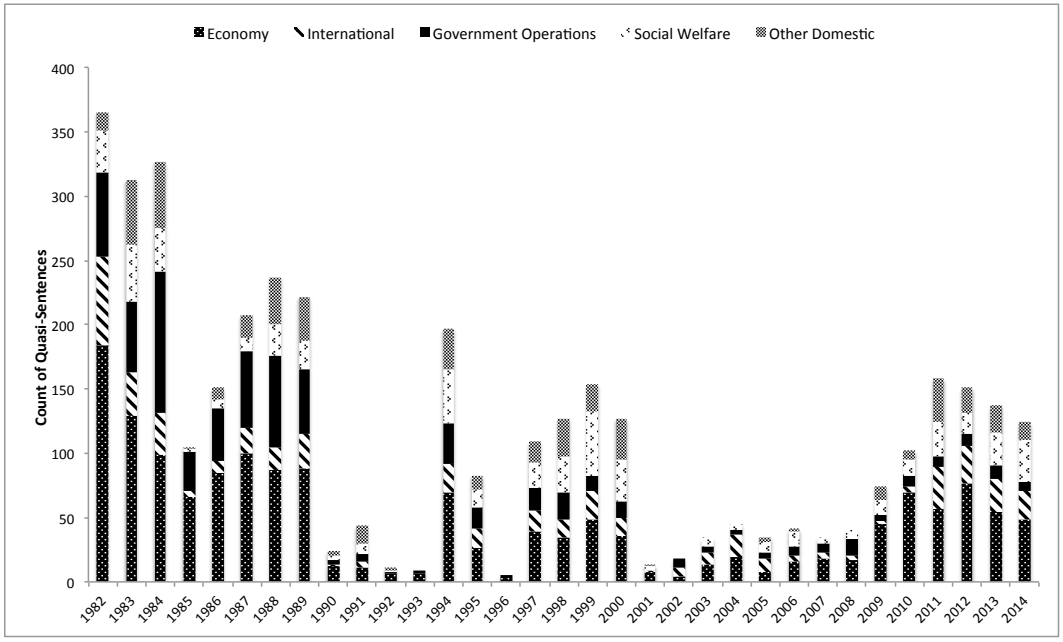
These data were collected for this dissertation from American Presidency Project website. We can see, in Figure 3.5, that this tool is used sparingly, as there are many years without a speech. In Figure 3.5, we can

see the number and distribution of policy areas in those years with a speech. Across all 34 years, there were 110 speeches, with each speech assigned a code based on the primary policy topic. What we see is that it is very common for a president to give a few speeches in the years he gives them at all and they tend to be used primarily for international affairs (69 speeches).

Presidents also have annual budget messages. These are annual written messages that open the president's budget proposal to Congress. They are an opportunity for the president to communicate his priorities that are a part of his budget proposal, which is the ultimate reflection of the presidents policy proposals, as policy can only happen when there is money to implement and enforce it. Yet the budget message isn't as high profile as the three prior tools. While Congress, the bureaucracy, and the media pay attention to the president's budget message and proposal, the tool barely registers with the public. As such, the budget message is one of the most important, if low profile, proposal tool the president has at his disposal.

That lower attention level makes the budget message a much different policy tool than the prior proposal tools that we have discussed, and yet, in terms of function, it is very similar to the State of the Union address. It is an opportunity early in the year for the president to set out his policy priorities for the year ahead and give them to Congress for them to act on. When we look at Figure 3.6, we see that the form of the message is very different from the State of the Union, in that it fluctuates wildly in terms of the length from president to president, but that is similar to the State of the Union in that they touch,

Figure 3.6: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Budget Messages



at least briefly, on a wide range of policy areas. These data were collected for this dissertation using the FRASER budget archive, which is a part of the St Louis Federal Reserve (https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/54#section-2010). The dataset omits the budget message from 1981 as President Carter submitted this in the last month of his administration, not President Reagan. In the 33 years of this dataset, the average budget message was 124 quasi-sentences long, though the longest was 380 quasi-sentences in 1982 and the shortest was 5 quasi-sentences in 1996 amidst the government shutdowns.

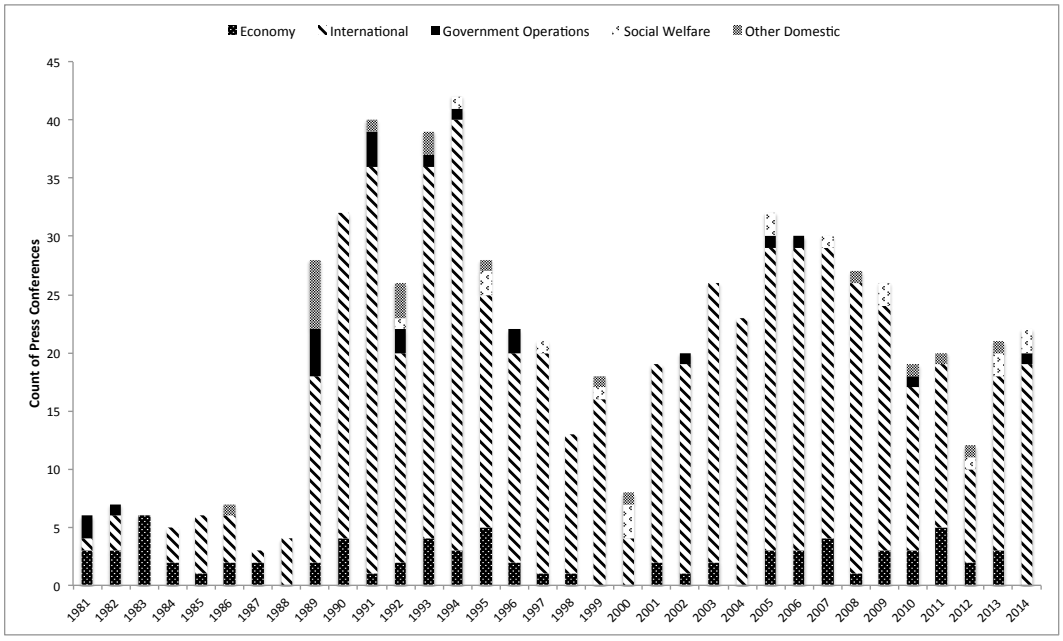
The last proposal strategy tool the president has is the press conference opening statement. Presidents routinely go before the press with a statement that they then follow with a question and answer period with the press. These

press conferences are an opportunity for the president to put forth a message directly to the media, but they also offer an opportunity for the press to ask questions about a wide range of subjects. As such, presidents want to use these press conferences to appear responsive and accessible, but not use them too often as they provide opportunities for gaffs and questions that the president isn't prepared to handle. This dataset looks only at the prepared opening remarks that presidents give at the start of the press conference. They were collected from both the joint and solo news conferences available via the American Presidency Project. Over 34 years, presidents gave 698 opening statements at press conferences, where each opening statement was given one code based on its primary policy area. What we can see from looking at Figure 3.7 is that most of these statements deal with international affairs, reflecting the fact that almost every meeting with a foreign dignitary includes a joint press conference.[5] International affairs is also a prominent macro topic as presidents tend to talk directly to the media about defense issues, such as military operations abroad as part of the president's commander-in-chief function. Outside of international affairs, the most common policy area is the economy (the subject of 76 statements).

The next strategy that presidents have a their disposal is the shaping strategy. This is an opportunity for presidents to get involved in the later stage of the policy process, either through negotiating with Congress prior to

[5]President G.H.W. Bush was the first president to hold a joint press conference with a foreign leader, which is why President Reagan looks different.

Figure 3.7: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Press Conference Opening Statements

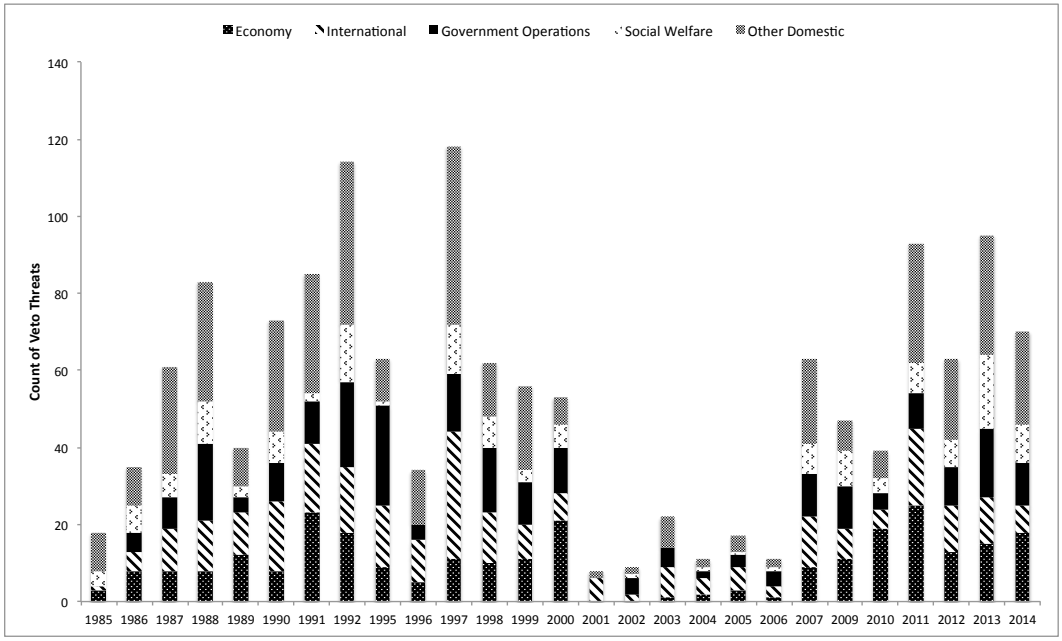


the passage of a law or by providing some instructions to the bureaucracy after the passage of a law, but before it is implemented.

The first tool in this strategy is the veto threat. A veto threat is a shorthand name for a Statement of Administration Policy in which the president threatens to veto a piece of legislation if it comes before him with certain provisions. These have been studied extensively by Samuel Kernell in his book *Presidential Veto Threats in Statements of Administration Policy: 1985-2004*. Kernell makes the point that a true veto threat isn't simply a dare to Congress to pass legislation that he wouldn't approve (Kernell 2006). Instead, a veto threat offers alternative policy ideas or language that would be acceptable; a counter-offer of sorts in a negotiation with Congress. Presidents use these threats to try and get Congress to pass a law that is closer to the president's position or is at least devoid of the most objectionable components. In this dissertation, these data were collected by Kernell and updated by Jonathan Lewallan and are available via the PAP. Due to data only being available starting in 1985, the 27 years of the study contain 1,443 veto threats. As we can see in Figure 3.8, presidents have used veto threats the most in the area of other domestic policy, though it drops off precipitously in the G.W. Bush administration, as he used the tool very rarely for any policy area in the first six years in office.

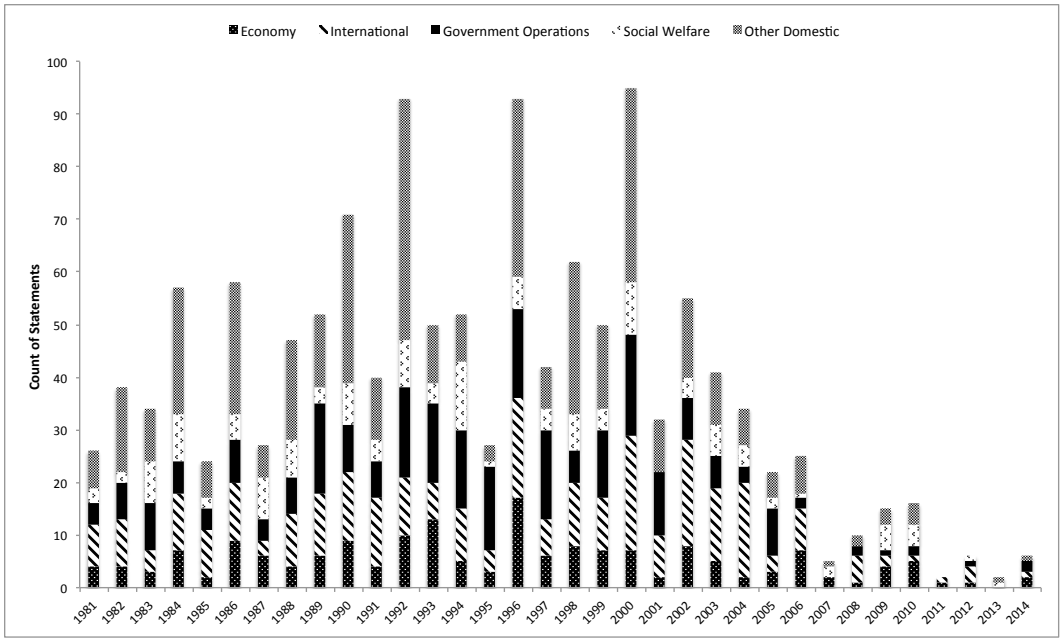
The other tool in this strategy is a signing statement. These are both written and oral messages from the president to the bureaucracy on the passage of a bill. Most of the time they are inconsequential, the president talking

Figure 3.8: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Veto Threats



about just how much he likes the bill that has been passed. But occasionally, they are an opportunity for him to provide significant guidance to bureaucrats about how they should implement a piece of legislation; directing them to focus on some aspects of the bill and ignoring others. It gives the president an informal sort of line item veto, by giving him the opportunity to tell the bureaucracy to ignore certain provisions. These statements have evoked significant controversy at times, exemplified by Senator Arlen Specter's objection that congressional legislation "doesn't amount to anything if the president can say, 'my constitutional authority supersedes the statute.' And I think we've got to lay down the gauntlet and challenge him on it." This potential for controversy complicates the president's choice to use the tool. The Office of

Figure 3.9: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Signing Statements



Legal Council, in 1993, wrote up an official opinion on the legal significance of signing statements, ultimately concluding that:

> Many presidents have used signing statements to make substantive legal, constitutional, or administrative pronouncements on the bill being signed. These uses of Presidential signing statements generally serve legitimate and defensible purposes. (1993).

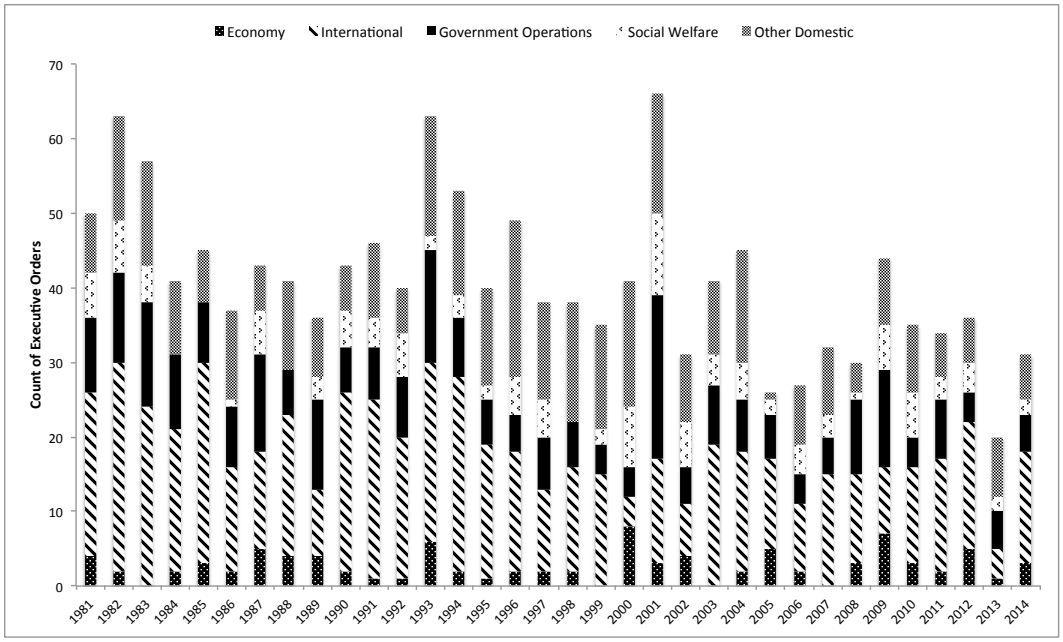
These data are original to this dissertation and were collected from the American Presidency Project. For this dissertation, I didn't distinguish the congratulatory, inconsequential signing statements from the controversial signing statements, as this distinction was beyond the scope of this project.

Instead, the 1,309 statements across 34 years were studied for what policy area the statement was primarily about. What I find, from looking at Figure 3.9, is that the number of signing statements peaked during the Clinton administration and has been on the decline ever since, despite maintaining considerable variation in the breadth of topics addressed in signing statements.

The final strategy at the president's disposal for getting involved in policy is for them to take unilateral action. Unilateral action is where the president gives an order or other kind of action and policy immediately changes. There are three main types of unilateral actions used in this study and the differences between the three on paper can be quite subtle, as in form and function they can seem very similar. Because of this similarity, the line between each of these actions has blurred and presidents sometime use them interchangeably.

Executive orders are directives from the president that, when founded on the president's constitutional or statutory authority, have the force of law. As explained in a 1957 description from the House Committee on Government Operations, an executive orders are "generally directed to, and govern actions by, Government officials and agencies. They usually affect private individuals only indirectly" (Staff of House Comm. on Government Operations 1957). Executive orders are used in a number of different ways, but the most prominent purpose is to issue binding orders to the executive branch. This formal direction give executive branch agencies a clear mandate for action on a given policy area and moves the responsibility for policy change from the agency to

Figure 3.10: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Executive Orders



the president.

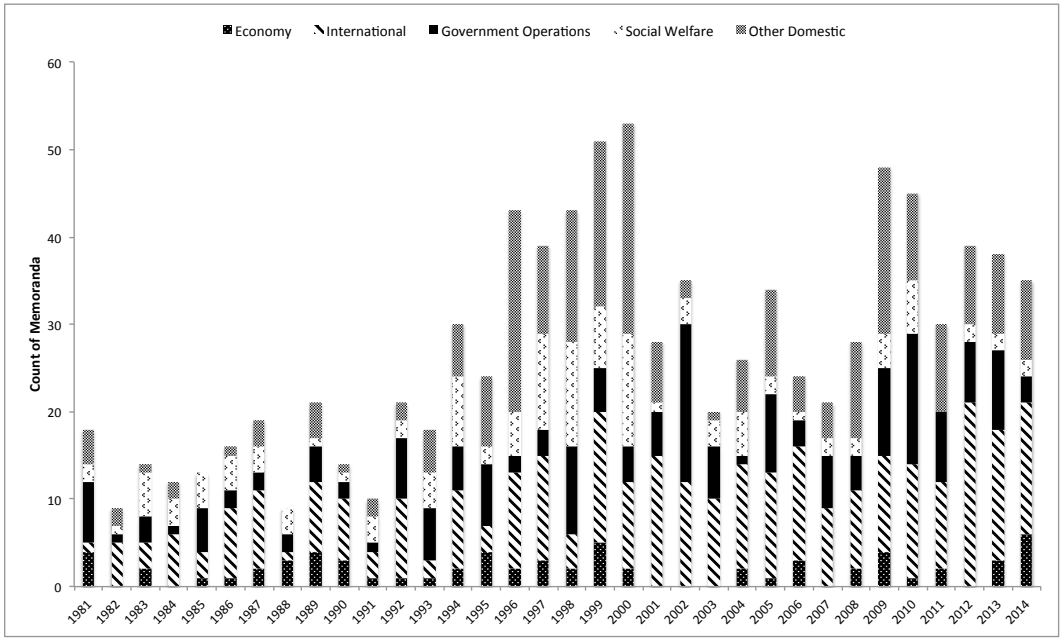
The Policy Agendas Project collected these data, and in the period of this dissertation, there were 1,397 executive orders. What we see when we look at the distribution of policy areas over time in Figure 3.10 is that presidents use executive orders to pay attention to every policy area, at least a little, but that they use them more extensively in international affairs (547 orders), other domestic policy (353 orders), and government operations (275 orders). Additionally, there seems to be a slight downward trend in the use of executive orders over time. This might be due in part to the increased use of the other unilateral action tools for substantive policy making.

Memoranda are very similar to executive orders. These are pronouncements by the president directed toward the executive branch agency heads, but are called memoranda. The fact is, memoranda are essentially equivalent to executive orders, with a different name and without some of the formal legal requirements of an executive order. The use of these tools is so similar that even presidents sometimes can't remember whether they took action via an executive order or a memorandum (Cooper 2014). The evolution of memoranda to be equivalent to an executive order highlights the importance of studying a broad range of policy tools. If we were to do what previous studies have done and focus simply on executive orders, we would miss a great deal of actions that presidents consider equivalent and have similar effects on the policy system, despite the different name.

These data are original to this dissertation project. There are 928 memoranda, covering all five macro topics, which we see in Figure 3.11. Two facets of the data become immediately obvious from the figure. First, Democrats use memoranda more frequently and to cover a greater variety of topics than Republican presidents. Second, the most prominent policy areas are exactly the same as the most prominent topics in executive orders: international affairs (306 memos), other domestic policy (243 memos), and government operations (183 orders memos).

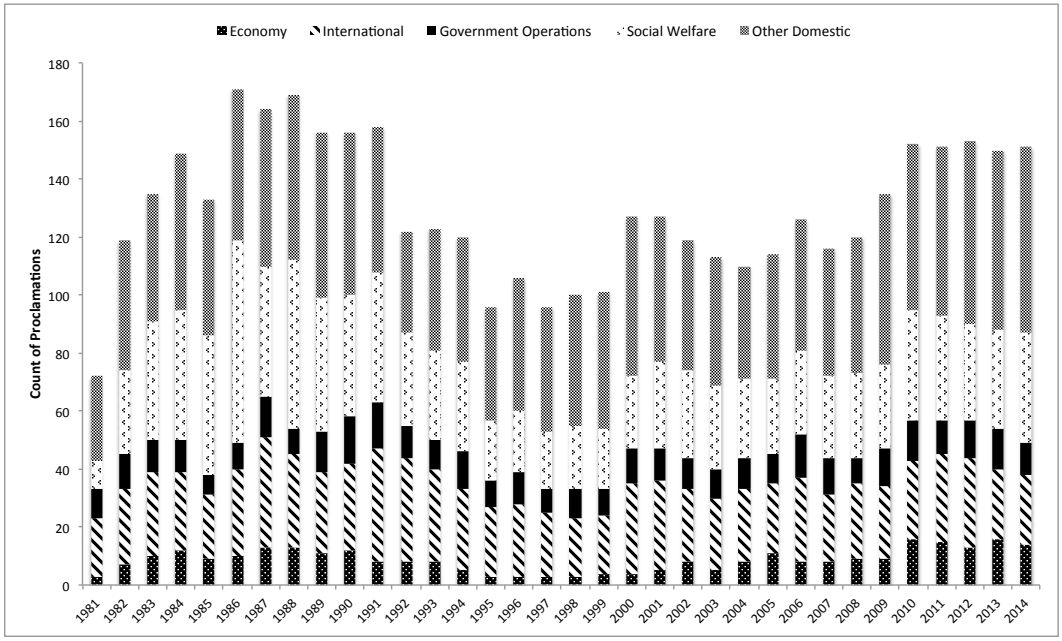
Proclamations are subtly different. Proclamations are directives that primarily affect the activities of private individuals. As the House Committee of Government operations noted, "since the president has no power or author-

Figure 3.11: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Memoranda



ity over individual citizens and their rights except where he is granted such power and authority by a provision in the Constitution or by statute, the Presidents proclamations are not legally binding and are at best hortatory unless based on such grants of authority" (Staff of House Comm. on Government Operations 1957). We see this play out in the way presidents use proclamations, as many are symbolic and issued every year, such as recognition for the American Red Cross association. This symbolic component of proclamations makes it slightly more difficult to directly interpret the presidential action. If we looked at Figure 3.12, it would seem as if presidents use this tool to make substantive policy on all policy areas every year, when anyone who looked more closely at the titles of the proclamations would realize he does not. Instead,

Figure 3.12: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy in Proclamations



it is interesting to look at those areas where there is greater variation in the amount of attention over time, such as the economy, which was the subject of 16 proclamations in 2010 and 2013, but only three or four proclamations through out most of the Clinton administration. These data were collected specifically for this dissertation and there were a total of 4,410 proclamations.

One characteristic of note in this study is the different units of analysis across the datasets. Some of these datasets are coded at the quasi-sentence level, while others are coded at the document level. A quasi-sentence is the text between periods, question marks, and semi-colons; each quasi-sentence represents a complete grammatical phrase—an idea. A dataset is coded at the quasi-sentence level because the policy tool the dataset focuses on cov-

ers a wide variety of policy areas. By coding budget messages, State of the Union addresses, and addresses to a joint session of Congress at the quasi-sentence level, it is possible to pick up on the wide range of potential topics that presidents can address in those speeches.

However, not all policy tools are designed to cover multiple policy areas. Some presidential actions focus primarily on one policy area. The datasets for these tools are assigned one macro-topic code to represent the primary policy area that the document focuses on. Those tools that are coded at the document level are executive orders, veto threats, signing statements, memoranda, major televised speeches, proclamations, and press conference opening statements. In this dissertation, I account for the differences between these two levels of analysis by focusing on the proportions of attention the various policy areas receive out of all the attention that the president pays to policy in a given period of time.

Additionally, as this project moves forward, I will bring these two units of analysis into a more comparable structure. I plan to do this by devising a weighting scheme that would allow me to transform document-level observations into quasi-sentence-level observations. I will do this by creating an estimation process that calculates the average length of each type of document under each president. This calculation would allow me to better approximate the value of a given document relative to other actions by that president.

The estimation procedure utilizes a 10 percent sample of each presidents actions in each document-coded policy tool. By counting the number

of sentences in each of the sampled observations and then taking the average, I can create a multiplier specific to each president's use of each document-level policy tool. For example, if President Reagan's average executive order was 40 quasi-sentences long, then I would multiply every one of President Reagan's executive orders by 40. This will allow the executive orders, and the other document-level datasets, to be equally represented, relative to the quasi-sentence-level datasets, in the analysis.

3.4 Analysis Techniques

In order to make the most of all of this new data, we need to do several types of analysis. First, it is important to study the data directly though graphical analysis, as we began to do in this chapter with the policy tools. This kind of analysis is helpful for answering basic questions about how the presidents have prioritized the various policy areas and strategies, both within presidencies and across time. Then, we have to move on to more complex compositional analysis in order to answer the other half of the questions that interest us: how presidents make trade-offs between the different categories of policies and strategies. This kind of analysis is dynamic and requires thinking quite carefully about the method of analysis.

3.4.1 Graphical Analysis

In each substantive empirical chapter, I engage in two types of graphical analysis. First, I examine the way the policy areas and strategies are used in

each presidency. I do this by taking the sum of a presidents actions in a given category, whether that is a policy area or a strategy, and divide it by the total number of actions by that president. For example, to calculate the average amount of attention that President Reagan gave to economic policy across his whole presidency, I take the number of actions, across all strategies, that President Reagan took on the economy (1,554) and divide by the total number of actions he took across all policy (5,856) to find that he spent 26.5% of his presidency on the economy.

It is important to note that when I am talking about the percent of time a president spent on a policy area or a strategy, either over the course of a presidency or over smaller units of time, I am only talking about that percentage as a portion of time that presidents spend on policy. So when I say 27.3% of President Reagan's time was devoted to unilateral action, what I mean is, of the time that he spent on policy, which is a fraction of the president's day, 27.3% of that policy time is devoted to unilateral action. Moving forward, I will attempt to remind readers of that fact, but it is important to be clear from the outset about the fact that I can only calculate the proportion of the president's policy-dedicated time, rather than his total time.

The second step of the graphical analysis is to look at presidential priorities over time. This allows us to see how presidents prioritization of policies and strategies is dynamic over their time in office. It is important to understand the dynamism over time because of the way it can reflect a change in the way the president processes information and makes decisions. This is

calculated very similarly to the static presidential averages, only instead of looking at the sum total of attention to a policy area or strategy for a whole presidency, we look at the amount of attention to that policy or strategy in a given period of time. In chapters 4 and 5, the unit of time is the quarter, as it allows some detail without overwhelming complexity. In chapter 6, when we look at both the policy areas and the strategies, the unit of time is the year, which helps to simplify the complexity that occurs by looking at both policy and strategy.

3.4.2 Compositional Analysis

After we examine the data graphically, it is time to look at how presidents make trade-offs between categories and look at the independent variables that shape these decisions. To do this we use compositional analysis, specifically the Dynamic Pie technique developed by Philips, Rutherford, and Whitten (2016*a*; 2016*b*). Compositional analysis is based on the reality that much of politics is competitive; if one policy area is getting more attention, other areas are necessarily getting less, because the total amount of attention a decision maker, like the president, has is finite (Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*). Compositional analysis is a useful approach to understanding the dynamics of trade-offs.

Let's first define a compositional variable.[6] A compositional variable is

[6]For a more technical description of the estimation techniques, see Philips, Rutherford and Whitten (2016*a*,*b*).

made up of a number of categories, the value of each must be between zero and one and, when summed together at a specific point in time, must sum to 1. These constraints are required as the relationship between each category in the compositional variable represents the proportion of the total attention. Any change in a category indicates that other categories have changed as well, so over time they must sum to a constant value. This also means that any change in a category can not be larger than one or negative one and the sum of the changes from one point in time to the next must sum to zero. This is because the total absolute size of the compositional variable is static; instead, it is the relationship between categories that changes.

Political science has been using compositional analysis to understand the relative nature of politics for quite some time. John Aitchinson originally pioneered the technique while studying the mineral composition of lava, in order to study the relationships between the components of the samples, rather than the absolute amounts of the components (Aitchison 1982, 1983, 1986). Katz and King (1999) applied this idea to political science to solve the problems associated with using standard regression models with data that has strict bounds and additive constraints. Tomz, Tucker and Wittenberg (2002) innovated with the technique to allow scholars to work with more than three categories by moving from an OLS framework to a seemingly unrelated regressions framework, demonstrating that it was just as easy to use and produced more efficient estimates than the Katz and King approach. Yet the techniques of these researchers did not tackle the challenge of dynamic data, particularly

change in observations over time.

Instead, the standard approach for time series compositional analysis has been to take a simplified approach, one that lumps all the categories other than the one of interest together and compares the change in relationship over time between the interested category and the sum of the remainder topics (Lewis-Beck 1997; Nicholson, Segura and Woods 2002; Lipsmeyer 2011). This can be a useful technique for understanding how one category changes over time, but it does not help us to understand how all the different categories can move in response to each other.

The Dynamic Pie approach of Philips, Rutherford, and Whitten is sensitive to the dynamism of time and individual categories. Instead of studying one category against all the rest, this approach allows researchers to look at pairs of categories, tracing relationship between the categories. These pairs of categories are the dependent variable that we are able to test other independent variables against.

Estimating the relationship between categories in a categorical variable requires a log-ratio transformation because the transformations are easier to handle mathematically than the ratios (Aitchison 1986). Because these logged ratios are not always stationary, the Dynamic Pie approach estimates the relationships between categories using a seemingly unrelated regression estimation approach using an error correction model (Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*). This approach allows for the estimation of equations that may have correlated errors, which we should expect theoretically in our analysis, as the

independent variables in our estimation of the relationship between each pair of categories is the same, which would reasonably result in contemporaneous correlation of errors (Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*).

Interpreting the results from the Dynamic Pie analysis can be difficult as there are $J-1$ equations, where J is the number of categories, and there are $(J-1)((K*2)+2)$ parameters, where K is the number of independent variables. This means for a model with 5 categories and 4 independent variables, there are 4 equations, 10 unique pairs of categories, and 40 total parameters to interpret. This large number of parameters is because error correction models produce both long and short run estimates for the effect an independent variable has on the dependent variable.

Because of this complexity and the difficulty of interpreting the error correction model coefficients directly because of the log-ratio transformation, in the main text of the dissertation, we will interpret the relationships indirectly. We will do this by simply looking at the directionality of the relationship between the pairs of categories estimated by the model. In the full results, available in the chapter appendices, we distinguish between positive and negative coefficients, where a positive coefficient means that an increase in the independent variable leads to an increased prioritization of the numerator category and a negative coefficient leads to an increased prioritization of the denominator category. In each case, the additional attention the prioritized category is getting comes from the de-prioritization of the other category. For example, if an increase in the unemployment level leads to a positive coefficient

in the $\frac{Economy}{International}$ ratio, then we could say that increases in unemployment lead to the president prioritizing the economy and sacrificing attention to international affairs. In the body of the dissertation, rather than deal with positive and negative coefficients, I swap in up ($\Uparrow$) and down ($\Downarrow$) arrows to symbolize the directionality of the relationship, as it is easier to remember that an up arrow means that the numerator category is getting attention from the denominator category than it is to remember what a positive or negative sign indicates.

3.5 Conclusion

This dissertation is driven by the data. So much of the research on the presidency has been based on theory and individual cases. Rigorous data and empirical analysis has been missing from most of the studies of the president because of the way scholars have regularly focused on the individual presidents. As I set out in the past chapter, behavioral choice is dominated by general psychological phenomenon, which means that we must look across presidents and their individual decision in order to find the commonalities that exist and that past studies have ignored.

This study marshals this data, made up of ten datasets and over 27,000 observations to study what it is that presidents pay attention to, the strategies they use to pay attention to it, and the trade-offs they make between prioritizes to understand their decisions and gain greater insight into how they prioritize information.

In subsequent chapters, we will look at the data from different angles. In the next chapter, we will focus on how president distribute attention across different policy areas and how they make trade-offs to reflect their different priorities. In the following chapter, we will consider the types of actions that presidents take to get involved in the policy process and consider how presidents prioritize those different strategies. Finally, in the last empirical chapter, we will address how presidents make trade-offs in policy areas across the different stages of the policy process. These data helps us to understand the many ways that the president makes decisions given his cogitative and emotional limitations and highlight the president's true title: the prioritizer-in-chief.

Chapter 4

Presidents and their Policy Prioritization

4.1 Policy Prioritization: The Move From Raw Information to Policy Attention

On any given day, the president needs to pay attention to a wide range of issues. Some days, monumental events occur, quickly changing the focus. On one such morning, September 11, 2001, President Bush had to quickly move from a classroom visit meant to illustrate the importance of education to dealing with national security and the reality that the country had been attacked. Other days, there is much more deliberate plan in which the president has a carefully scripted message and events to reinforce it. Yet, even on days dominated by scheduled, scripted policy roll outs, the president's attention must be divided across a number of topics. For example, on February 27, 2014, a completely ordinary day in the White House, where the focus was on President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative, which was meant to help boys and men of color succeed, the president started his day with his national security briefing and he ended his day meeting with the Secretary of Treasury. The presidency requires the president's attention to be constantly shifting between policy areas.

Consequently, one of the most important things to understand about

presidential decision-making is how presidents allocate attention across policy areas. As we outlined in the theoretical chapter, presidential decision-making hinges on the way that presidents process information and prioritize policy areas. Issue prioritization reflects the president's ability to decide what must be addressed now versus what can be dealt with later. Presidential issue prioritization has consequences for the broader policy process, making it important to understand what exactly it is that presidents are paying attention to.

The public policy and presidency literatures have given some serious thought to the president's role in the policy process. Scholars highlight three main roles the president can play. First, the president can bring attention to issues (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Kingdon 1984) and set the agendas of other institutions (Delshad 2012; Edwards and Wood 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004; Rutledge and Larsen-Price 2014; Taylor 1998). In many ways, the president is like a human starting gun; when the president wades into an issue, many people who hadn't been paying attention, suddenly pay attention. This quality of the presidency is why presidents must carefully weigh whether they want to get involved in an issue. Presidents who are happy with the status quo will avoid talking about an issue so as to not bring attention to it, as attention is a necessary, but not sufficient prerequisite for policy change.

Second, presidents can activate public support (Kernell 2007). It is important to distinguish activating support from persuasion. Despite the classic Neustadt argument that the "power of the president is the power to persuade" (Neustadt 1991), modern scholars have found that the president isn't very

good at changing the minds of people who disagree with him (Edwards 2006). Instead, the president is good at is getting people who already agree with him to take action (Canes-Wrone 2001; Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Canes-Wrone 2006). An active public has an effect on members of Congress and the larger political landscape. But, it all starts with the president calling public attention to an issue.

The final role the president plays in policy making is as an independent actor. Over time, the president has developed a number of tools to change policy independently of the other branches of government. These tools are subject to checks and balances, but they provide a way for the president to move swiftly (Cooper 2014; Gitterman 2017; Mayer 2002; Pious 2009; Waterman 2009). We discussed these tools individually in the previous chapter and we will consider how they are used more in the next chapter, but they capture the president's role as an independent policy actor.

Give these three roles; it is clear that the president is an important actor in the policy process. As such, it is vital that we take time to understand what policies the president prioritizes. If we don't know what it is the president is prioritizing, it is impossible to understand the true impact the president has on the policy system. Yet, as I have outlined in previous chapters, existing work on the presidency has subjected itself to some very real limitations. Some work has only considered the role of the presidency in a theoretical way; focusing on the impact the president's agenda-setting abilities might have on the systemic agenda (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Kingdon

1984; Light 1991; Neustadt 1991). Others scholars have taken a more empirical approach, but have considered only individual policy areas (Delshad 2012; Edwards and Wood 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004). This individual policy approach is problematic because of the need of presidents to prioritize. Presidential attention is limited, so it is best to think of the president's attention to policy as zero-sum; most of the time, when the president starts paying attention to a new policy area, it is because he has stopped paying attention to another area. This creates an order of priorities that is constantly being updated.

Yet presidential prioritization and the zero-sum nature of presidential attention are complicated by public expectations. The public largely expects the president to pay attention to all issues. As the most visible public official, presidents are expected to have opinions on every issue and a solution to propose for every problem. This expectation requires the president to be able to quickly shift his attention when emergencies pop up in order to stay responsive to public expectations.

All of this attention and the constant shifting of priorities require the ability to process information in order to make decisions about what the president is going to pay attention to. This means that presidential decision-making is a function of constant trade-offs and juggling policy areas. Presidential decision-making has not been studied in an empirical way that includes the trade-off dynamic.

In this chapter, we will conduct an empirical investigation into what

policies presidents pay attention to and how they make trade-offs between policy areas. We do this by examining some empirical expectations that come from existing work in presidency studies. We find is that presidents largely pay attention to those policy areas that are part of their constitutional obligations, but that they are also highly responsive to policy problems in their environment, rather than being driven by party affiliation.

4.2 Distribution of Attention: Expectations from the Presidency Literature

Scholars of the president have long attempted to understand what motivates presidents to pay attention to particular policy areas. The academic community recognizes that presidents are motivated by larger institutional and political factors. The fact that the distribution of presidential attention is primarily determined by institutional characteristics is not surprising. Many presidents and their advisors acknowledge that the presidency is a force in and of itself that the occupant has to learn how to harness before they can manipulate it for their own purposes (Light 1991). As such, we should expect presidents to largely prioritize those policy areas that are a function of the institution rather than the individual or the campaign. These motivations fall into three categories: constitutional obligations, economic accountability, and party preferences. This chapter tests these motivations to see how presidential decision making about what policies to address matchs with the literature.

The first expectation is that presidential attention is driven by the

Constitution and powers and policies set out by the framers. Article 2, section 2 sets out three main powers and duties of the presidency: to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces,[1] to be chief diplomat,[2] and to be the head of the executive branch.[3]

The first power laid out by the Constitution that was specifically vested in the presidency was the power to be commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The founders intentionally reserved the ability to declare war to Congress, but they knew that once war was declared, the military needed to be able to look to a singular leader, one who could act with speed and decisiveness (Howell and Johnson 2009; Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013). As commander-in-chief, the president is the central political figure when it comes to military decision-making, so we should expect him to prioritize the issue regularly.

The second power set out in the Constitution can be summed up as the president's position as diplomat-in-chief. Explicitly, the Constitution grants

[1] "The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States..."

[2] "He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors..."

[3] "...he may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any Subject relating to the Duties of their respective Offices..." and "... he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments." And "The President shall have Power to fill up all Vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate, by granting Commissions which shall expire at the End of their next Session."

the power to make treaties and appoint ambassadors, subject to Senate approval. That power, along with the necessity of presenting a unified message when speaking to the world and dealing with foreign leaders directly, has evolved to mean that the president is the primary decision maker when it comes to matters of foreign affairs (Howell, Jackman and Rogowski 2013). The post-WWII world order has rested on a dominant, commanding U.S. president setting out a vision for diplomacy and the democratic free world. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect the president to regularly prioritize international affairs.

The final power explicitly set out in the Constitution declares that the president is head of the executive branch. The Constitution imagined this to be a limited role, giving the president the power to appoint cabinet members and to require reports from the heads of the executive departments. The power to appoint individuals insures that cabinet officials are attentive to the priorities and preferences of the president, but insuring their compliance requires that the president be attentive to what is going on in the executive branch. Overtime, Congress has granted the president the power to reorganize the executive branch; consequently, the president is concerned its efficient operation. All of these powers mean that we should expect the president to prioritize his attention to government operations. The powers of the presidency, of course, have grown in the last 230 years, creating an institution far beyond anything the founders could have imagined, but it is unsurprising that the central purpose of the institution would survive to this day and be an important force in

shaping presidential policy priorities.

H: Policy areas that are part of the president's constitutional duties are routinely on the agenda

Presidential policy attention is not merely a function of the Constitution, however. Most notably, presidents must also pay attention to the economy. Indeed, they receive much of the credit and blame from the public for economic conditions, despite having few tools at their disposal to manipulate macroeconomics, as fiscal and monetary policy are largely out of the president's control (Peterson and Rom 1989). In fact, many economists have found that the state of the economy is one of the best predictors of presidential vote choice (Fair 1978, 2009; Kahane 2009). Given that electoral fortunes are so closely tied to the economy, I expect that the president will regularly prioritize the economy.

H: The president will prioritize the economy at all times in response to public accountability.

Policy priorities are not simply shaped by the institution. They are also a function of who holds the office. While there may be some variation in priorities that is a function of the exact individual in the office, there is reason to believe that the pattern is not dominated by the precise individual, but rather the party they represent (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996). Issue ownership theory says that, in a campaign, a candidate will succeed when they are able to claim that they are the better able to solve certain

issues and problems than the other candidate (Petrocik 1996). Because of these dynamics in campaigns, the Democratic and Republican parties have developed reputations for having certain competencies and policy experience. Presidents will work to advance the reputation of their party by prioritizing those issues that their party is associated with.

Additionally, presidents prioritize policies in line with their party's vision for the proper role of government. Ever since Ronald Reagan, in his inaugural address, said "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem,"[4] one of the fundamental schisms between the Democratic and Republican parties is on whether government is the problem or the solution to the challenges society faces. Republicans fundamentally believe that government, particularly the federal government, should be very limited, focusing on policies such as national defense, and get out of the way of industry. They also believe that it is not the government's role to provide a social safety net. Democrats fundamentally believe the opposite. They believe that the role of the federal government is to level the playing field for all, by providing social services to lift up the poor and chronically underrepresented so that they can succeed. Additionally, they believe that businesses, if left to self-regulate, will pursue actions that are disadvantageous to society, such as polluting, and must be regulated.[5]

[4]Ronald Reagan: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/"pid=43130

[5]See the Democratic and Republican party platforms from the last few presidential elec-

Issues ownership theory and the gap between the philosophical positions of the two major parties mean that we should expect Democratic and Republican presidents to prioritize different policy issues. For Democratic presidents, we should expect them to prioritize social welfare and other domestic policy issues. For Republican presidents, we should expect them to prioritize business issues and world affairs.

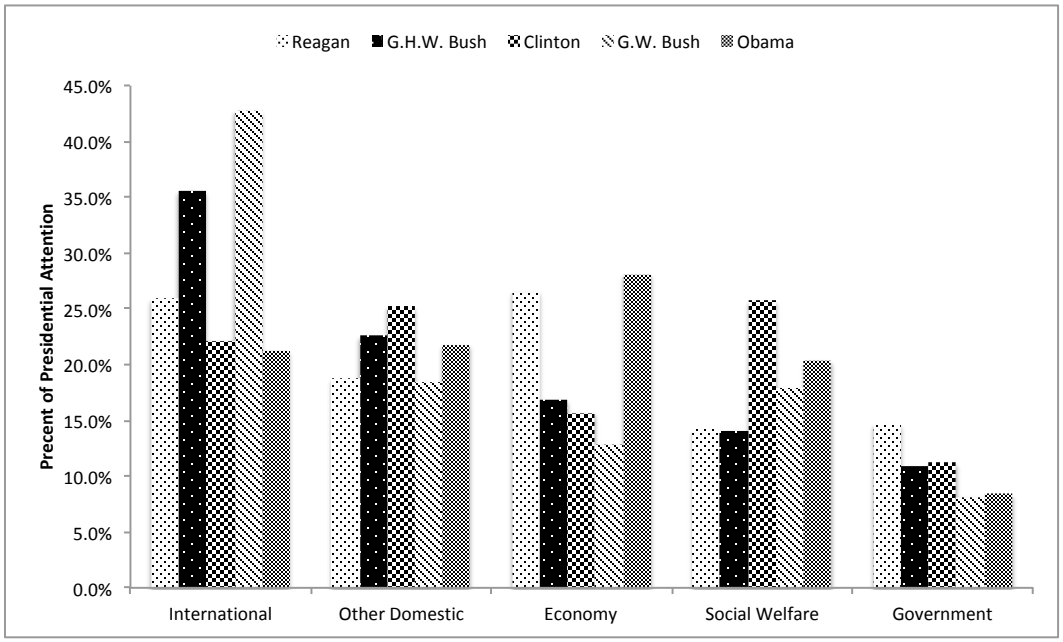
H: Presidents will prioritize the issues most associated with their party. Democratic presidents will prioritize social welfare and other domestic policy, while Republicans will prioritize business issues and world affairs.

4.3 Graphically Analyzing Presidential Priorities

When analyzing presidential priorities, an important first step is to observe what it is that presidents are paying attention to. We can look at this a number of ways; here we are going to first aggregate priorities over presidents and then examine them across time. When we summarize priorities by president, we are able to see the general dynamics; how a president prioritized the issue across the 4 or 8 years he was in office, but we are unable to see how they made trade-offs between policy areas. When we examine the policy areas over time, we are able to see the changes in prioritization across time, but it is more difficult to generalize about what it is that presidents pay attention to. Because of the strengths and weaknesses of each type of analysis, we will

tions for evidence of these beliefs (Available on the Datasets Page of the U.S. Policy Agendas Project http://www.comparativeagendas.net/us).

Figure 4.1: Average Presidential Attention by Policy Area



do both.

4.3.1 Policy Prioritization Across Presidents

When we look at figure 4.1, we are able to see the general prioritization dynamics across the five policy areas and five presidents. The first takeaway from the table is that there is general support for the constitutional obligation hypothesis. The international affairs category, which contains both defense and international relations, including diplomacy, is routinely prioritized by presidents, making up anywhere from 42.7% of President G. W. Bush's policy attention, to 21.3% under President Obama. We also see regular prioritization of government operations. Although this category represents the

smallest overall share of the presidential agenda under each president, this single policy area makes up between 8.2% and 14.7% of presidential attention. Although this substantively smaller than the other policy areas, it is also a much more narrow segment of the policy agenda, so it is significant that this one area even receives as much attention as it does.[6] The routine prioritization of international affairs and government operations provides support for the constitutional obligation hypothesis.

Figure 4.1 also provides some initial support for the economic accountability hypothesis. We see that the economy is routinely prioritized, making up at least 12.8% of President George W. Bush's attention. But the issue seems to be prioritized much more prominently in times of economic crisis than the economic accountability hypothesis might suggest. President Obama paid the most attention, 28.1%, and President Reagan the second most, 26.5%, to the economy. The slightly lower amounts of attention paid by Presidents George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush are interesting, as these presidents were still responsible, in the eyes of the people, for economic conditions. So, although there is clearly some support for the economic accountability hypothesis, it is not as robust as the support for the constitutional obligation hypothesis. This means that it will be an important area of focus in the compositional analysis.

When we turn to examining the party preferences hypothesis in Figure

[6]For a reminder of which PAP major topics make up each of the five categories, see Chapter 3

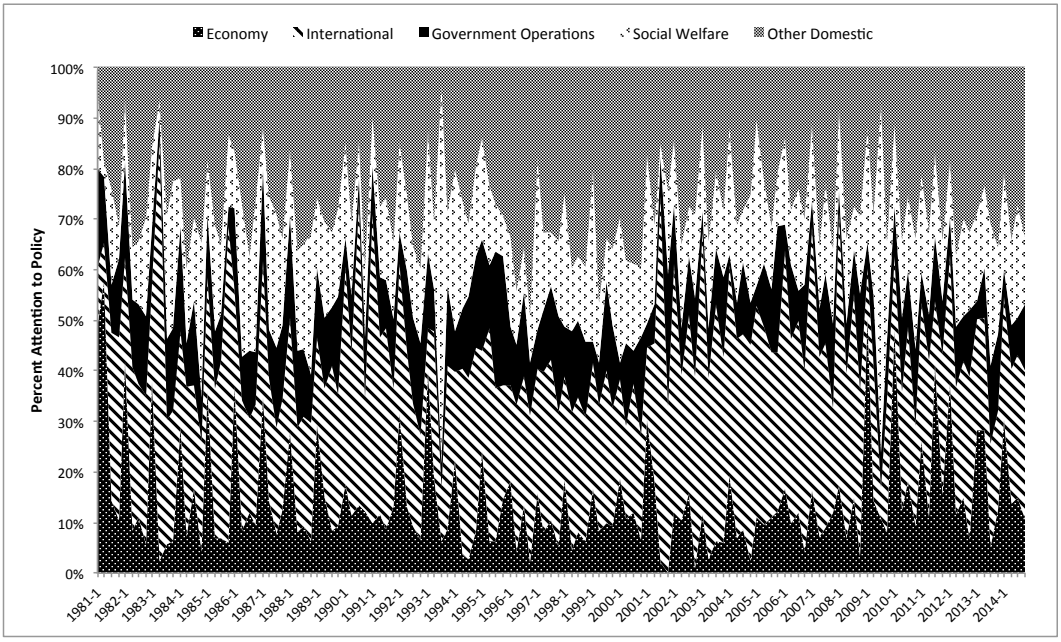
4.1, we see some differences between how Democratic and Republican presidents pay attention to policy, but the exact pattern is unclear. Remember, issue ownership theory would say that Democrats should prioritize social welfare and other domestic policy areas more than Republicans do, but they don't, or at least they don't prioritize those issues more than all Republicans. When it comes to social welfare, we do see Presidents Clinton and Obama pay more attention than the Republicans, paying 25.7% and 20.4% respectively. That is substantially more than Presidents Reagan and G.H.W. Bush, who averaged across the entirety of their presidencies paid 14.2% and 14.1% respectively. Yet, President G.W. Bush paid 17.9% of his attention to social welfare, looking more like President Obama, than the other Republican. When we look at other domestic policies, we see Presidents Reagan and G.W. Bush paying similarly low levels of attention, 18.8% and 18.4%. Presidents Clinton, G.W. Bush, and Obama all paid similar levels of attention, with President Clinton paying the most attention at 25.2, G.H.W. Bush paying the next most amount of attention, at 22.6%, and President Obama paying the least amount of attention at 21.8%. Across these two issues the Democrats pay more attention, but in each case there is one Republican president who is not far behind.

When we look at those priorities that Republicans would "own" under issue ownership theory, we see a complicated picture. Part of the complexity is inherent in the nature of Republican issues. Business issues and world affairs significantly overlap with the president's constitutional obligation to international affairs and the economic accountability expectation. This overlap

between the core of presidential responsibilities and issue ownership theory is part of the reason why Democratic candidates have a harder time making their case to voters that they can solve the problems facing the country. When we look at Figure 4.1 to see how Republican presidents prioritize international affairs, we see that the President Bushes certainly prioritized the policy areas quite strongly, with President George H.W. Bush devoting 35.5% of his time and President George W. Bush devoting 42.7% of his time to the issue. However, our other Republican president, who some might say was the archetype of the modern Republican president, President Reagan, spent only 25.9% of his attention on the issue, looking a lot more like the Democrats, who spent 22.2% (President Clinton) and 21.3% (President Obama) of their time on international affairs. This suggests that the prioritization of international affairs is more of a function of US involvement in wars abroad and other exigent circumstances, than it is a function of peacekeeping, diplomacy, and involvement in international organizations.

When it comes to the economy, we also are missing support for the idea that Republicans "own" the issue. The two presidents who prioritized the economy the most were Presidents Reagan and Obama, with the economy making up 28.1% of President Obama's attention and 26.5% of President Reagan's attention. This suggests that, like international affairs, the prioritization of the economy crosses party lines and is instead a response to the urgency of the policy problem. Presidents Reagan and Obama's times in office were characterized by severe economic recessions, which forced the presidents to

Figure 4.2: Distribution of Presidential Attention to Policy, Quarterly



pay considerable attention to the economy and make many decisions about how to get the country out of the economic hole that it had found itself in. The urgency of the problem had similar effects on both Democratic and Republican presidents, putting to bed the idea that the economy is an issue associated with one party. Both the phenomenon here and in international affairs suggests that prioritization of these issues is a function of crisis, not party preferences.

4.3.2 Policy Prioritization Across Time

We see a much more complicated picture when we move to looking at these dynamics across time, rather than by aggregating across a whole

presidency. In Figure 4.2, we can observe the way each of the five policy areas is prioritized in every quarter from 1981 to 2014 and how changes in those priorities require the president to make trade-offs. For instance, we still see the regular prioritization of international affairs, government operations, and the economy across all presidents, but the amount of attention given to each is subject to peaks and valleys in response to the other policy areas.

We also see substantial spikes in attention to social welfare, particularly under Presidents Clinton and Obama. This suggests that, while on average presidents pay similar amounts of attention to social welfare across the course of their presidency, Democrats do it in a concentrated way, and then once the policy change is achieved or abandoned, there is a shift to focusing on other policy areas, while Republican presidents take lower intensity, but more constant approach to social welfare policy.

We also see more nuanced patterns when we look at international affairs. In Figure 4.1, we noted that the two President Bushes paid more attention to international affairs than the other three presidents. What we see when we look at that over time, in Figure 4.2, is that under President George H.W. Bush and President George W. Bush, international affairs was a pretty constant priority; when a trade-off needed to occur in order to increase attention to another policy area, they didn't sacrifice their attention to international affairs. Instead, they would decrease their attention to one of the other three policy areas. President Reagan, over the course of his presidency, paid less over all attention to international affairs than the other Republican presidents, but

his presidency is really interesting in that, when he did prioritize the issue, it received a lot of attention, crowding out the other policy areas. The Democratic presidents on the other hand, paid less attention to international affairs over all and, at certain points in time, such as when they were trying to make big changes to social welfare policy, allowed those priorities to push international affairs almost completely off the agenda.

These graphical analyses make it clear that there are some interesting and complex dynamics at hand in understanding what it is that presidents pay attention to and how they prioritize that attention. It also raises questions about the factors that shape the trade-offs that presidents must make between policy areas. After all, in the limited attention world of the presidency, if one policy area is on the rise, another is in decline.

4.4 The Trade-Off Game: Compositional Analysis of Presidential Policy Priorities

Statistical analysis techniques, like compositional analysis, allow us to examine how presidents make trade-offs and understand the factors that affect those trade-offs. Dynamic Pie analysis, which we described in some detail in chapter 3, allows us to examine pairs of policy areas to see the relationships between them. For instance, we can see if an increase in a particular independent variable, like the defense spending, has a significant influence on the relationship between a pair of policy areas, such as social welfare and international relations. By being able to see whether the defense spending has a significant

effect, but also the direction of the effect, we can test those hypotheses we set out earlier and learn how constitutional obligations, economic accountability, and party preferences shape policy trade-offs.

To test these hypotheses, we need to introduce a series of independent variables that represent the aspects of the world that we think affect presidential trade-offs. All in all, this is a very simple model; testing only the effects of the economy, defense, and presidents' party. The first thing that we are interested is the effect the economy has on presidential policy trade-offs. This is examined via two independent variables: percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth and the number of people who were unemployed. These indicators allow us to see the effect of good and bad economic conditions. By using these two variables, we can see how an improvement in the economy, measured by an increase in the percent GDP change, and we can see how a increase in unfavorable economic conditions, measured by an increase in the number of people who are unemployed, affect presidential decision making.

To examine the effect of world events on presidential decision-making, I also include the level of military spending. This is a very loose proxy for how active the U.S. is around the world, with the assumption being that the more the U.S. is spending on defense, the more the U.S. is involved around the world. This is only an approximation of U.S. involvement, because it does not factor in any increases in diplomatic action around the world, but logic would say that if the U.S. is needing to conduct more foreign relations and diplomatic efforts, it is because of a problem occurring in the world and that

it might be paired with an increase in military spending to prepare in case it should it become necessary for the military to get involved. In many ways, military spending can reflect both current needs and the perception of what might be needed in the future. Things like planes and ships and submarines take quite some time to build, so if the writing is on the wall for a military buildup, the U.S. government has to start spending money well in advance of the actual need.

Finally, I include a dummy variable for the president's party at each point in time to test for any party effects. As we saw in the graphical analysis, the role that party is quite complicated. There doesn't seem to be any issue ownership effects, but there do seem to be some differences between the two parties, making it important to take into account in the analysis. This dummy variable is a very simply way to see if there is a systematic effect.

The compositional analysis is conducted at the quarterly level in order to get a better look at the way presidents are constantly juggling, while still allowing for some level of pattern to emerge. Monthly analyses have too much variation to be able to discern any kind of a pattern, while annual analysis obscure some of the variation that occurs so we miss out on the interesting complexities of the decision-making process.

Although I have covered the details of compositional analysis in the previous chapter, let's quickly review the important characteristics of Dynamic Pie analysis. First, it is important to remember that the dependent variables are the ratio of the one policy area to another. As the ratio gets bigger, the

numerator policy is increasingly prioritized, and when the ratio gets smaller, it is the denominator policy that is prioritized. Yet, this is complicated by the fact that the coefficient produced by the seemingly unrelated regression with an error correction model cannot be direct interpreted. Instead, we can only learn directionality and statistical significance from the regression results. Additionally, as the underlying model is an error correction model, we need to consider both the short- and long-run effects of the independent variables. Short-run effects represent the effect that the independent variable has on quarter to quarter changes, while the long run effects represent the effect the variable has on the trend over time.

So, in the tables presented in this and the following chapters, I present the results using arrows. An arrow with an asterisk, whether it points up or down, means that the relationship is significant at the 0.05 level. An up arrow ($\Uparrow$) means that the ratio is getting bigger and that the numerator policy is gaining the president's attention and that attention is coming from the denominator policy. A down arrow ($\Downarrow$) means that the ratio is getting smaller and that the numerator policy area is losing presidential attention and that attention is going to the denominator policy area. For those who are interested, full coefficient tables are available in the chapter appendix.

4.4.1 Results

When we look at Table 4.1, which considers the short-term effects, and Table 4.2, which considers long-term effects we see a variety of results. First,

Table 4.1: Estimated Short-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Percent GDP Change								⇓*
Unemployment Level					⇓*			
Defense Spending				⇑*				
Democratic President			⇓*				⇓*	
R-Squared								

⇑*: significant at 0.05 level

it is important to note that when the economy is good and GDP is going up, presidents are able to have more diverse policy agendas, in part because they are able to prioritize other domestic policies. In each of the three significant relationships across the short- and long-term, the other domestic policy category is prioritized over social welfare, over international affairs, and over government operations as the percent change of GDP rises. One way to think of this is that, when times are good, presidents have the freedom to prioritize issues such as the environment and civil rights, and it is less important that they pay attention to their central responsibilities of international affairs and government operations and that it is less important that they pay attention to social welfare, as fewer people are likely to need a bolstered social safety net.

This changes as economy gets worse and the unemployment level rises. Conventional wisdom would suggest that the only policy area that would be prioritized in that situation would be economics, as high levels of unemployment occur during bad economies and require a comprehensive solution to fix. What we see is that over the long term, while the economy is prioritized over international affairs, higher levels of unemployment have a broader affect on

Table 4.2: Estimated Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Percent GDP Change					$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$
Unemployment Level			$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$				
Defense Spending	$\Uparrow^*$							$\Downarrow^*$
Democratic President			$\Downarrow^*$				$\Downarrow^*$	
R-Squared								

$\Uparrow^*$: significant at 0.05 level

presidential prioritization. When the unemployment level is high, rather than just focusing on the economy, presidents also prioritize other domestic policies over social and economic policy, and government operations over domestic policy and international affairs. One thing that is very interesting to note in the short-term analysis, is that when the unemployment level rises, it can take some time for the president to adjust to the new state of things. As such, we see that the president prioritizes other domestic policies over social welfare. It can take some time for the president to realize there is a problem, so in the short term, might ignore social welfare issues because it hasn't yet become clear that it matters.

While not what I initially expected, the prioritization of government operations isn't terribly surprising. Recent presidents like to talk about making government more efficient, more responsive, and that is a particularly good argument to make when the economy is struggling. After all, when there are high levels of civilian unemployment, a bloated federal government and bureaucracy, which runs on the taxpayer's dollars, is a particularly unappealing

political image.[7] The focus on other domestic policy was more of a surprise; however, when we think about periods of high unemployment in the past, like during the Great Recession, we saw an emphasis on infrastructure projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act as a way of putting people back to work. As infrastructure is considered an other domestic policy area in this coding macro-topic scheme, it makes sense that it would be prioritized at times of higher unemployment.

When we consider the effect that defense spending has on the president's priorities, conventional wisdom would say that an increase in spending might cause an increase in the prioritization of international affairs. While we do see that dynamic in two cases, where the president is more likely to prioritize international affairs over the economy in the short term and international affairs over government operations in the long term, we also see defense spending having an effect on the relationship between social welfare and government operations, with the president prioritizing social welfare policy, and between other domestic policies and government operations, with other domestic policies being more highly prioritized. The fact that defense spending had an effect on the relationship that government operations has with other policy areas was unexpected. Perhaps the relationship between government operations and defense spending is a function of the rhetoric that is commonly

[7]Some might wonder how nominations fit into this picture, as the Policy Agendas coding scheme includes those in this category. The short answer is that they don't fit in: nominations were not the subject of a significant number of the actions in this project. This is because nominations are largely their own action, that has been much studied in the agency control literature.

used around government operations. Often, when the issue is prioritized it is discussed in terms of making government smaller and more efficient. This is a great argument to make when you are calling for cuts in spending across the board, but it is a much more difficult argument to make when there is an increase in defense spending. Consequently, it makes sense that the president would not prioritize government operations.

Finally, lets consider the role that the president's party plays in his prioritization. One of my initial expectations was that Democratic presidents would "own" social welfare and other domestic policy issues, which were not born out in the simple, aggregate graphical analysis. Yet, when we looked at the trends in presidential priorities over time, there seemed to be differences between the Democratic and Republican presidents. The results here demonstrate that, while issue ownership theory may not explain presidential decision-making, there is a role for party. In this compositional analysis, we see that Democratic presidents prioritize other domestic policy along with government operations. But in each case, those policies are being prioritized at the expense of international affairs, a marked distinction from Republican presidents. This is extremely interesting as the category of international affairs is a policy area that contains two of the president's constitutional obligations. The fact is that Democratic presidents not only prioritize a range of other policy areas more, but do so by paying less attention to one of their main duties is quite startling and a very telling difference in priorities between Democratic and Republican presidents. It lends some credence to the argument that Re-

publican presidential candidates make that they are better at focusing on the core of the presidencies responsibilities: foreign affairs and defense. While there might be a reasonable disagreement over whether Republican positions on those issues are better than Democratic positions, these results certainly show that Republicans put a higher priority on those issues.

4.5 Conclusions

The goals of this chapter were quite simple: to study what it is that presidents pay attention to, in order to understand the trade-offs that they have to make, and the factors that shape those decisions. I did this by looking at the distribution of attention across policy areas, both as averages across a whole presidency as well as broken up over time to see the trends and trade-offs. I also did this by examining how they made trade-offs. Dynamic Pie compositional analysis techniques allowed us to understand how it is that president use their finite time and the factors that have a significant effect on their decision making.

What I found was, in some cases, confirmation for existing theories, and in other cases quite surprising. One of the central findings was that, across time, political party, and political context, presidents have common obligations. The structure of the job and its constitutional requirements and expectations require presidents to regularly make decisions to prioritize the economy, defense and international affairs, and government operations. These have been their core duties since the founding and, as we see, they constantly

fulfill them. Yet the domination of these core duties also has the potential to crowd out other more "discretionary" policy areas. If you are constantly focused on those policy areas, it can take a huge effort or an emergency for those core areas to get de-prioritized and another policy area to take center stage.

Another finding is that presidents are constantly forced to make trade-offs and decide how to re-prioritize their attention to issues. Amongst all policy areas, but particular when dealing with discretionary policy areas like social welfare and other domestic policy, presidents must constantly reassess whether and how much to prioritize an issue. That is a substantial, on-going cognitive task that means they constantly have to juggle different issues. That juggling requires a huge effort and has an impact on their ability to process information smoothly. If you are having to regularly decide whether to pay attention to an issue, it means you are also having to analyze the information coming in. By having to ask over and over "should I/can I/do I pay attention to this issue," presidents earn their title of Prioritizer-in Chief.

One finding highlighted is that those decisions about what policy areas to pay attention to and the trade-offs between them are, as we saw in the compositional analysis, responsive to environmental pressures. Presidential attention to economics and international affairs are particularly sensitive to what is occurring in the world and thus the state of the policy problem. Both President Bushes heavily prioritized international affairs because of U.S. involvement in wars abroad, while Presidents Reagan and Obama paid more

than the average amount of attention to the economy because of recessions that the country experienced during their presidencies. Presidents change the way they treat their issue priorities based on pressures from the environment.

The final part of all of this is the role that party plays in decisions about what to prioritize. What we find is that there are not simple dynamics at play. Issue ownership theory doesn't explain presidential priorities and yet, there are differences between what Democrats and Republicans prioritize, with Democrats paying more attention to some issues and Republicans paying more attention to others. We do see Democrats make some large pushes for social welfare issues at specific points in time, like when Obama and Clinton made attempts to reform the health care system, but in the aggregate Democrats don't that much pay more attention to social welfare than than President G.W. Bush. Likewise in the economy, there doesn't seem to be a substantial difference between the parties, but rather the response is driven by economic conditions. The only area in which we see regular differences between the parties is in the Dynamic Pie analysis, where we see Democrats regularly de-prioritize international affairs. This is significant because the international affairs category contains two of the president's constitutional obligations. By making that choice, whether consciously or not, to de-prioritize international affairs, the decision-making process of Democrats is very different from the process of a Republican, and that is important, particularly in an era where presidential policy preferences set the agenda of Congress. Presidential priorities have huge consequences for the American people.

It is worthwhile taking a moment to consider the generalizability of what we have observed in this chapter. One aspect that is particularly of concern is whether these results are a product of the sample. By focusing on Presidents Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama, have the results been biased by the dynamics at play from the 1980s to present and the personalities of the individuals in the sample? This is particularly worth thinking about in the area of international affairs and the finding that Democrats prioritized the area less. In this era, Republicans were more likely to engage in wars of choice than Democrats. After all, Kuwait and the Second Iraq War were policy decisions of Republican presidents, though it is arguable that the war in Afghanistan was an inevitability after the 9/11 terror attacks, while Democrats were in control either at times of relative peace, as in the case of Bill Clinton, or worked to draw down and extricate the country from war, in the case of President Obama. If we were to go back to the decisions of Presidents Carter or Johnson, would we see the same effects, or would international affairs become another area in which there is no difference between Democrats and Republicans? While we currently have no way of knowing, it is worthwhile to think about the effect the period of study might have on the generalizability of these findings.

This chapter considers what issues president's look at and how they make trade-offs between them. But these aren't the only decisions that presidents face. They must also decide what tool strategies they are going to use, because presidential decision making about policy is not merely a function of

the president's issue prioritization, it is also a function of how he is goes about doing it. The next chapter focuses on the policy tool strategies that presidents have at their disposal and how they make trade-offs between them.

Chapter 5

Presidents and the Selection of Strategy

Presidential decision-making is a complex process. Before the president can take action that may affect the larger policy process, he must sift through information and make two decisions. The first decision relates to which policy areas need his attention. That topic was examined extensively in the previous chapter. His second decision is the subject of this chapter: which of the three general strategies that the president has for policy action should be utilized in order to pay attention to the selected policy area.

Every strategy is made up of many different policy tools, which is defined as any action the president takes to get involved in the policy process. The decision about what tool to use and, thus which of the general strategies to use, is strongly shaped by the president's ability to process information. Presidents use the information they have about the state of the policy world and the political environment to take action within a wider political and policy system. In many policy areas, presidents have strong preferences about policy outcomes. Sometimes they desire substantial change in a policy area, such as the desire of Presidents Clinton and Obama to reshape the American health care system, and sometimes they prefer the status quo, such as the position

of ever president since 1972 to affirm the "One China" policy with regard to Mainland China and Taiwan.[1] Presidents want to maximize their limited time and attention and take actions in pursuit of their preferences. They use information about the world around them and their own power and ability, to select the strategy best suited to achieving their preferred policy outcomes.

In this chapter, I will examine how presidents use the three different policy tool strategies they have at their disposal and consider how they make trade-offs between theses strategies. The three strategies at the president's disposal are the ability to *propose* policy, the ability to *shape* policy late in the legislative process, and the ability to make policy *unilaterally*. I expect that presidents will largely be responsive to their political environments and prioritize different policy strategies in response to the political conditions that they face, whether that be the amount of support they have in Congress or the public, and that presidents are sensitive to political time, both across the years since an election and within a year as the legislative calendar progresses

I find confirmation for my expectation that presidents are sensitive to their political environments, but that they are much more sensitive to time, than they are to level of congressional support. Public support and the level of support the president's party has in the House of Representatives has no effect on how presidents prioritize their policy tool strategies. The Senate, on the other hand, does have a significant effect on the president, leading him to select

[1]Not counting President-Elect D. Trumps phone call on December 2, 2016 with ROC President Tsai Ing-wen and subsequent statements, which he later backtracked upon.

unilateral and proposal tools over shaping tools. Additionally, as the length of time since an election increases, so too does a president's reliance on shaping and unilateral action tools. Finally, over the course of a year, presidents favor late stage and unilateral action strategies suggesting that, overtime, as the legislative year ends, presidents race to achieve their policy goals.

5.1 Presidents as Strategic Actors

One of the most important thing to remember when trying to understand presidential decision-making is to remember that the people who become president are savvy political actors. Most are life long politicians and public servants, although the exact route that they take to the White House varies a great deal. Their path to the presidency ensures that they have developed the necessary political skills and instincts to take advantage of the power of the office. In particular, they have to develop a sense of their own power and the political environment in order to make strategically smart decisions about the course of action to pursue in order to achieve their policy goals. The choice of what actions to take and general strategy to pursue to make policy is tightly linked to their ability to process information about their political environment and their own power to affect policy change, whether through direct action or persuasion. Two factors influence presidents as they make these strategic calculations: first, they need to consider the amount of support they have from others in the political environment, as that support can translate into political capital, and, two, the expectations about the presidency and its role in the

policy process.

5.1.1 Sources of Support

The president looks to a number of different political actors and groups for support. The first group they look to is the public. Public support is thought to be the backbone of the modern presidency, as the president is the only elected official with a national constituency. With the rise of public opinion polling, presidents feel obligated to gain a sense of what the public prefers and be responsive, at least in some respects, to those preferences (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994, 2000; Wlezien and Soroka 2007). Public support is important because it has implications for reelection, presidential legacy, and for policy making (Light 1991). The public presidency has transformed the institution from one primarily concerned with making policy to one that is also concerned with selling it to the public (Tulis 2017). Beckmann's research on the presidential strategy of going public shows that public support for presidential goals can have an influence on Congress (2010). High levels of public support for the president and the policy agenda that he is pursuing can give the president freedom to get involved in the policy process. Low levels of public support can encourage a president to be cautious about policy making, as they don't have the public to turn to as a means to get what they want.

Another type of support that presidents have consider is the support that they have in Congress. A president's co-partisans in the House and Senate are the individuals who will carry the ball on the president's legislative policy

proposals. Having the president's party in the majority in the House and Senate can give a substantial boost to the president's policy making powers, as they are more likely to share policy goals, which would allow the president to pursue policy change via the proposal strategy. Unified government is by no means a guarantee of success; sometimes the party of the president is beset with internal factions that prevent majority party status for providing the kind of support presidents need to make policy, but, generally, the more co-partisans the president has in Congress, the more freedom he should have to get involved in the policy process.

Public support and legislative support are important factors in presidential decision making. The amount of support the president has from these two sources tells the president a great deal about the political environment and the amount of freedom and cooperation he might expect when he makes a policy move. We often think of that freedom as translating into political capital for the president; that is, a kind of currency that presidents accrue when they have support and must spend in order to achieve their goals. If we want to understand how a president makes decisions about the policy strategy to pursue, we must consider how he analyzes information about the political environment and his political capital.

5.1.2 Expectations of the Institutional Presidency

The choice about which of the three general strategies that presidents can use to make policy is not merely a function of the support they have

from other political actors and the public. Their choice of strategy is also a function of presidential sensitivities to what the job of president entails. Many of the powers and functions of the presidency were set out in the Constitution. Yet many other tools came about as the presidency expanded in practice over time. The tools of the presidency expanded to allow the president to fulfill the various duties set out in the Constitution, such as being commander in chief of the armed forces, chief diplomat, and head of the executive branch.

One such expansion was in the realm of unilateral action. While the Constitution didn't explicitly set out any methods for the president to make policy on his own, the founders knew that such ability was needed in the executive branch. In Federalist 70, Alexander Hamilton articulated an argument for a unitary executive, stating, "Energy in the Executive is a leading character in the definition of good government." Since George Washington, energy in the executive branch has been conveyed though actions, ranging from proclamations to executive orders, in which the president acted independently of Congress. Although unilateral action is often thought of as an innovation of the modern imperial presidency, some of the most consequential policy decisions in history have been the result of independent presidential action, such as Washington's Neutrality proclamation or Lincoln's emancipation proclamation (Fisher 1999; Rudalevige 2008). To understand how presidents use the different tool strategies, we need to be mindful of how presidents have come to view their own role in the policy making process. These beliefs and expectations are impossible to quantify, but they can help us to understand why

certain presidents might systematically make different strategic choices than others

5.2 The Information that Shapes Strategy Selection: Expectations from the Literature

The decisions a president makes about what actions to pursue are largely a response to information they are receiving from the environment: both information about the strategy itself and information about their political contexts. It is important to remember, however, that presidents don't always interpret information correctly. Disproportionate information processing means that they regularly misread a situation based on the information that they have, whether that information is about the political environment or about the strategy, itself, and make decisions about the strategy they should pursue that dont help them achieve their goals. Yet even with the risk that presidents won't always make the right choice about what strategy to pursue, there are still strong reason to believe that presidents can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies and the world around them in order to make strategic choices and trade-offs about what tool strategies to pursue.

5.2.1 The Strategies

Presidents have three general strategies at their disposal: the ability to propose policy, shape policy, or take unilateral action. The first strategy is to propose the desired policy outcome, whether that is policy change or the

continuation of the status quo, and make an argument for that outcome. This strategy originates in the Constitution via the direction that "[the president] shall from time to time give to the Congress Information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."[2]

Presidents are not limited to making policy proposals via the State of the Union. Presidents have interpreted that Constitutional obligation more broadly and, as discussed in Chapter 3, have developed a wide range of tools for communicating policy proposals. This range of tools offers the president a number of venues and opportunities to shape the policy process.

From a theoretical standpoint, it is reasonable to believe that that proposing policy is the president's preferred course of action because, if he can propose policy and it gets enacted, he gets his favored outcome in the format that is most durable, with the fewest costs (Jenkins and Patashnik 2012; Krehbiel 2010). A successful presidential proposal will result in new legislation, which is ideal because it is durable; only the courts or another piece of legislation can overturn the policy change, while the courts, Congress, or a subsequent president can overturn unilateral actions. However, there are many times the president cannot get what he wants simply by proposing policy, so he needs to use other strategies.

The second general strategy presidents have is to shape policy at the

[2]From Article 2, section 3

late stages of the legislative process either just before or just after passage. Just as with proposing policy, this strategy originates in the Constitution, but the exact way presidents use it has evolved since the time of the founding. The Constitution charged the president with the power to check the legislative branch through the veto,[3] enabling him to give a final up or down vote on legislation. Over time, this power has grown to become more flexible; offering more proactive avenues, though still reactive to congressional activity, for involvement in the formal legislative process. Whether through a veto threat or a signing statement, presidents have extended the role they play in the legislative process. Presidents shape policy through communications with Congress and the bureaucracy in an effort to make their wishes known before policy is enacted. These tools do require initial action on the part of Congress, but once those initial conditions are met, presidents have a fair amount of latitude for shaping the policy that emerges.

The third and final general strategy that presidents have to make policy is unilateral action. As mentioned earlier, the origin of the unitary executive was the desire for an institution with the energy to tackle problems quickly in response to the changing situation in the world. This required giving presidents the power and tools to act on their own. While the use of unilateral action has grown from largely symbolic proclamations to more substantive memorandum

[3]Article 1, section 7: "Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States: If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his Objections to that House in which it shall have originated..."

Table 5.1: The Distribution of Individual Policy Tools into Tool Strategies

Policy Tools	N=	Strategy
Budget Messages	34 Messages	Proposal
Major Televised Speeches	110 speeches	Proposal
Press Conference	698 statements	Proposal
Speeches to a Joint	9 speeches	Proposal
State of the Union	34 Speeches	Proposal
Signing Statements	1,309 statements	Shaping
Veto Threats (1985-2014)	1,443 threats	Shaping
Executive Orders	1,398 orders	Unilateral
Presidential Memoranda	928 memoranda	Unilateral
Proclamations	4,410 proclamations	Unilateral

and executive orders, each evolution has come about as presidents have tried to solve problems. Many times throughout history, presidents have looked to a hopelessly divided Congress and taken action on their own to secure the change that they thought was necessary.

One component that is important to remember is that each of these strategies encompasses multiple tools. Some tools have only one strategic use. For example, executive orders are only useful for pursuing unilateral action. After all, the purpose of an executive order is to provide instructions to the bureaucracy about a policy change that the president wants implemented. Other tools are more flexible. The more flexible tools can be used to pursue a couple of strategies, but each tool still has one primary strategy. Two of the tools that work this way are press conferences and major addresses to the nation. Most of the time, they are used by presidents to propose the policy change they want to see happen, but occasionally these can be a venue for the

announcement of unilateral action, as they provide a chance for the president to speak directly to the American people about issues that the president cares about. For example, when President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans program, which was actually implemented via a unilateral policy change made at the president's direction by the Department of Homeland Security, he gave a major televised address to announce the action. This was a different way of using the televised address, which is most commonly used to propose policy changes, like when President Reagan gave a prime time address to build support for his tax reform plans in 1985. President Obama and President Reagan prove that there are some instances in which a tool that is primarily associated with one strategy can be used to pursue another strategy.[4]

5.2.2 The Political Environment

The tool strategies are not the only piece of information that shapes the presidents choice of action; he must also pay attention to his environment. Presidents are heavily reliant on political capital, or the support of others whose opinion matters, in order to get things done. Policy accomplishments require others within politics to either support the president's policies or prevent active opposition. Because of this, presidents constantly need to assess how much political capital they have and the amount they might lose by taking any particular action or strategic approach.

[4]All actions of a single tool will be categorized according to that tool's primary purpose.

Political capital gives presidents the freedom to pursue their preferred course of action: proposing policy. As I mentioned earlier, it is reasonable to believe that presidents prefer to propose policy over the other two strategies, if they have any reasonable expectation that it will be effective (Krehbiel 2010).The power to do so is rooted in the Constitution and the resulting policy change is more durable than policy change that happens via unilateral or shaping strategies (Jenkins and Patashnik 2012). Additionally, when the president is proposing policy, there is time between an idea becoming public and its implementation to allow for public reaction and the adjustment of policy in response to those opinions.

However, proposing policy can also be highly ineffective. All of the strengths of the proposal strategy assume that the president's proposals are placed on the congressional agenda and that, when the issue is on the agenda, the president's preferred problem definition and solution are advanced. Many times, particularly when the opposite party of the president holds one or both of the chambers of Congress, the president can have trouble getting his agenda adopted by Congress. So while presidents might prefer to make policy via proposal strategies, they end up having to use their political capital to take unilateral action far more often than they are able to translate their political capital into policy proposals.

Just as political capital is useful for convincing members of Congress to take up presidential policy proposals, political capital is useful for getting members of Congress to ignore unilateral action. Unilateral action has the

force of law, as long as no one overturns it. This makes it an incredibly useful tool when Congress is unlikely to take the president's preferred action if he proposed it. A publicly popular president can take action independently and the force of his public support can dissuade members of Congress from actively resisting his choices, making it a potentially much more effective, though less preferred policy strategy.

Political capital is generated from a number of different sources. One potential sources is public support. The president relies on public support, as it is the key to electoral success, both for the president and for members of the House and Senate. A publicly popular president is able to use that support as a cudgel with reluctant members of Congress by highlighting to he member that their electoral chances are intimately tied to the successes of the president (Mayhew 1974).

One way that political capital via public support can be measured is by Gallup opinion polls, which measure how much the public approves or disapproves of the president's job performance. As a regularly tracked public opinion measure, presidents and pundits have closely monitored responses to this question as a sign of presidential strength. Presidential approval has been tracked via responses to the question "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [the president] is handling his job as president?"

Public approval numbers are meaningful largely because they increase the president's credibility when he "goes public" (Beckmann 2010). Going public is a phenomenon where presidents try to bring public attention and par-

ticipation to an issue. The ultimate goal of the strategy is not to change hearts and minds, though presidents like to think they can, but to activate those who already support the president's position and get them to put pressure on their members of Congress (Beckmann 2010; Edwards 2006; Edwards III 2009; Canes-Wrone and Shotts 2004; Canes-Wrone 2006). This creates a chain of support from the president through the public to the Congress, enabling a popular president to get what he wants accomplished. This makes the waxing and waning of presidential power particularly significant, because an unpopular president is not only in danger of losing reelection, but they are less effective at making what they want happen while they are in office.

H: Presidents with more public support will act unilaterally more often because they trust the public to support their decisions, which prevents Congress from overruling them.

Another potential source of political capital is electoral success in Congress. The president relies on his co-partisans in Congress to support his agenda. Under unified government, where the same party controls the presidency, House, and Senate, this support should be easier for the president to attain. In theory, unified government means that people with similar priorities and values hold the decision-making authority in each branch. These shared values can make it easier for the president to get his preferred policy through Congress, however that is not always true. In 1964, as President Johnson was trying to pass the Civil Rights Act, he faced significant opposition from Southern Democrats, a perfect illustration of how unified government does not mean

unanimous support for a presidents plans.

In general, the hyper-partisan era that has developed over the last 30 years means that a president's co-partisans in the House and Senate are more likely to be supportive than members of the opposing party, so it is worthwhile thinking about the amount of support that the president's party had in the House and Senate. Rather than simply evaluating whether there was unified government or not, which is a rather simplistic measure, we will consider the net number of seats that the president's party has in the House and Senate. This is a much more useful way to think about the level of cooperation the president has in Congress for a number of reasons. First, during this period, there are very few periods of unified government. Because unified government is rare, using it as a measure of presidential support would only help us to differentiate those 8 years from the other 26, but it does not help us to understand the majority of the time, which is under a variety of different configurations of divided government. A second improvement is based on the idea that the amount of support the president has is an important factor in his decision making. A president is likely to behave much more cautiously when he had only a small advantage in Congress, as losing a few votes can sink his goals, while as they might be much more daring and push for bigger changes when his party has a large majority. Finally, the net number of seats allows us to see the different relationships the president has with the House and Senate. The institutional differences, such as institutional norms, procedures, loyalty between the president and each chambers, deserve attention particularly when

we try to understand the amount of power the president has and how the president's party's status in the chamber affects his decision-making and policy tool strategies.

H: Presidents who have more support in Congress will use proposal tools more because they are more likely to get support for their proposals.

A third source of presidential political capital is timing. Right after a president has been elected, they have the most public support and political power. The power that they have right at the beginning of a term in office is a function of the wave that brought them to power. Over time, presidents lose political capital as they make decisions. Thus, over the course of the four years of a presidential term, there are changes in the way the president strategizes in his job because of declining political capital.

H: The first year after an election the president will propose more policy because he has the political capital to persuade Congress to take up the issue. As the number of years since an election increases, presidents will propose less policy because of a decrease in political capital

But presidential time is not just a function of declining political capital over the four years in office; there is also a cycle to the legislative year. Every presidential year starts off with a State of the Union address in which the president sets out his goals for the year. It marks the beginning of the president's policy-making year and is an opportunity for him to build political capital within Washington. It is in that moment that his ability to propose policy is

most potent. As the year progresses, the president's success at making policy via proposal tools declines as the distance from that political capital-generating speech grows.

H: The president will propose more policy in the first quarter of the year because of the focus and political capital that is generated via the State of the Union address. As the year proceeds, the president will use proposal tools less.

5.3 Graphically Analyzing Tool Selection

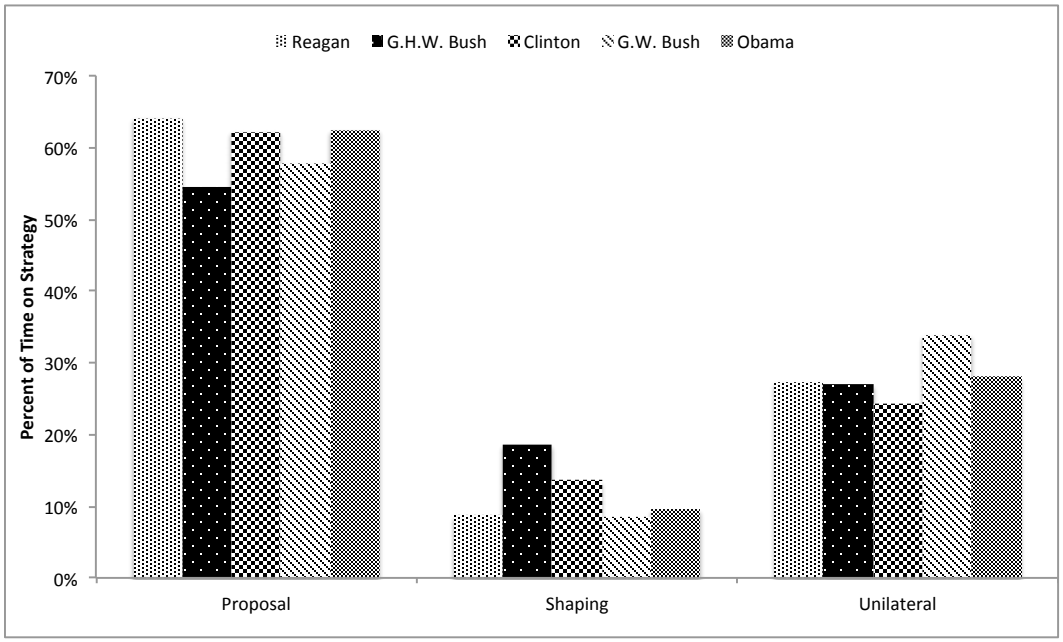
When it comes to analyzing presidential tool selection strategies, the first thing that we need to do is to look at how presidents use each of these tools on average across their presidencies. This strategy allows us to understand the general phenomenon that we are dealing with, even though it is not particularly useful for testing our expectation, as many of the hypotheses that we test are either a function of time or the effect of particular independent variables.

5.3.1 Strategy Selection Across Presidents

The first thing that we observe, when we look at Figure 5.1, is that all presidents use proposal tools in roughly the same proportion. Presidents spend roughly 60% of the time that they devote to policy pursuing change via proposing policy.[5] President Reagan used this strategy the most, propos-

[5]These are calculated based on the amount of time the president has already devoted to policymaking. From the data here, it is impossible to calculate what percentage of the

Figure 5.1: Average Presidential Use of Tool Strategies by Type



Note: The proposal strategy includes budget messages, major televised speeches, press conference opening statements, addresses to a joint session of Congress, and State of the Union addresses. The shaping strategy includes signing statements and veto threats. The unilateral actions strategy includes executive orders, presidential memoranda, and proclamations

ing policy 64% of the time when he was involved in the policy process. His sucesessor G.H.W. Bush used proposal tools the least, with only 54.4% of the time. Presidents Clinton and Obama proposed policy at approximately the same rates: 62.2% and 62.4% respectively. President G.W. Bush used proposal strategies at a similar rate to his father, using them 57.7% of the time. The differences between each of these steps are modest and non-statistically significant, indicating that while presidents like proposal tools, and use them the majority of the time, they cannot rely solely on proposing policy. Instead, they have to use other strategies.

When we look at how presidents shape policy at the late stage of the legislative process, we see similar levels of variation, but with different presidents emphasizing this strategy than we saw in the proposal strategy. Just as President G.H.W. Bush was the president who used the proposal strategy the least, we see that he was the president who tried to shape policy the most, using that strategy 18.6% of the time. President Clinton used this strategy a fair amount compared to the other presidents, 13.6% of the time. Presidents Obama, Reagan, and G.W. Bush used these tools the least, with President Obama using them 9.6%, President Reagan using them 8.7%, and G.W. Bush using them 8.5%. This is actually quite interesting as, while President G.W. Bush is thought of as one of the chief innovators in the strategic use of late stage policy tools, Ronald Reagan was the one who transformed their use as a

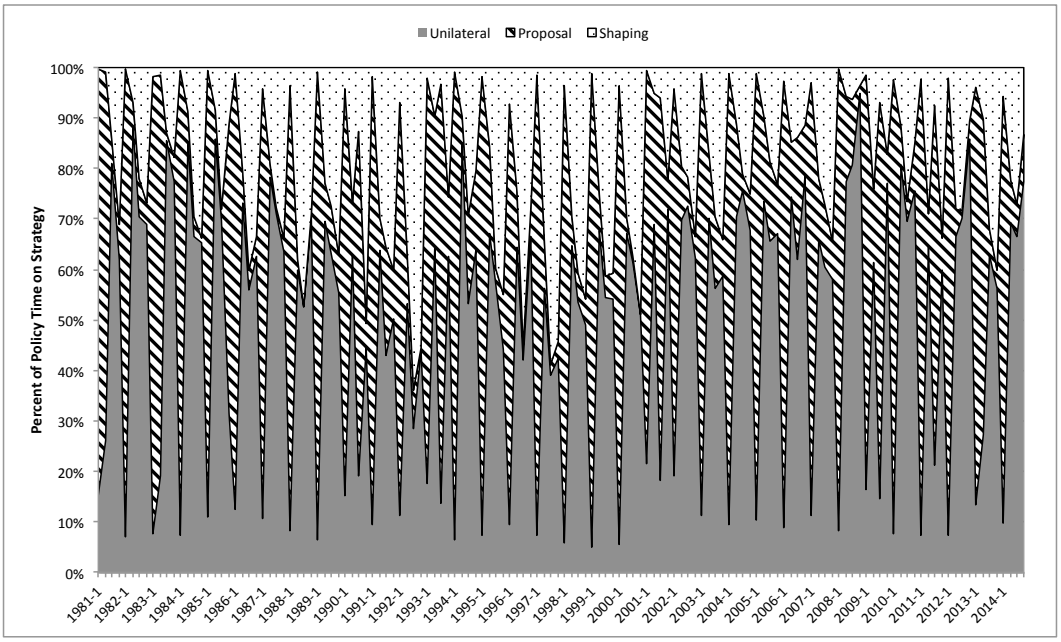
president's total time is devoted to policy, as such detailed records of the president time are not publicly available.

strategic tool (Cooper 2014). The fact that G.W. Bush used that category of strategy least of all presidents in this study is quite puzzling. It suggests that there is a difference between the frequency and the style of usage.

Finally, when we look at the unilateral action strategy, we see that all presidents make policy via these tools quite often. In fact, the president who used these tools least was President Clinton, and even in last place, he used the strategy in 24.2% of his policy change efforts. Presidents Reagan and G.H.W. Bush used these tools each about 27% of the time and President Obama only used them a little bit more, coming in 28% of the time. President G.W. Bush used unilateral action tools the most, pursuing 33.8% of his policy efforts via this strategy.

This graph, which shows how presidents use the three general strategies across their whole presidencies, does not present any clear indications of what motivates the choice of strategy. Nor does this graph give us a sense of why we see differences between presidents. What it does do is start to hint at the fact that presidents make trade-offs between the strategies they pursue. A president like G.H.W. Bush came in first place for his use of shaping strategies and last place in his use of proposal tools, relative to the other presidents. It suggests that there was something different his presidency than the others, which led him to pursue policy in a slightly different fashion than the other presidents of this study. All in all, while this graph is a good first cut at understanding how much presidents use the three general strategies, it motivates us to look more closely at the trends over time, as well as move on to more

Figure 5.2: Distribution of Presidential Tool Strategies by Type



complex compositional analysis in order to study the trade-offs.

5.3.2 Strategy Selection Across Time

The next step is to consider how presidents use these strategies over time. Looking at the presidents use of the tools at the quarterly level gives us a chance to see the variation that occurs within year, without being subjected to the continual noise that a monthly level analysis is consumed by. What we see is that there is both seasonality and regularity to the way in which presidents use their policy strategies.

When we look at Figure 5.2, we can immediately observe the seasonal trade-offs that presidents make. Every year, presidents spend a great deal of

their time at the start of the year proposing policy. This is largely unsurprising as the first quarter of the year typically contains the State of the Union address and the budget message. As the year goes on, the president does less and less policy proposing and more unilateral action and shaping of policy as he tries to accomplish those goals that he set out in the first quarter. Shaping strategies seem to happen most in the third and fourth quarters of the year, as the legislative process for the year starts to reach its climax and conclusion. Only in very rare instances is the president prioritizing shaping strategies in the first quarter of the year, as there is usually very little legislation nearing completion at that stage of the calendar. Finally, we see the president prioritize unilateral action most of the time, but not quite as strongly in the first quarter of the year. This suggests that the president has to make a trade-off between acting on his own and proposing policy for others to take up. Yet when we look at that same figure with an eye towards how presidents use the strategies regularly, we observe that the president is always using his unilateral action strategy, though the amount of the agenda that is channeled through these tools changes from quarter to quarter.

The final thing that is worth noting from Figure 5.2 is that the differences between presidents are quite subtle. Some of the findings of Figure 5.1, such as President G.H.W. Bush's heavy use of shaping tools and President Reagan, G.W. Bush, and Obama's lighter use of late-stage shaping tools compared with the other presidents, are still discernible when we look over time in Figure 5.2. Yet observing those patterns in Figure 5.2 requires looking

quite closely with some prior knowledge of what to look for, as the differences between presidents are much less stark than they were over policy choice.

5.4 Making Trade-Offs: Compositional Analysis of Presidential Strategy Selection

Just as with policy areas in the last chapter, it is important to consider how presidents make trade-offs between different tool strategies. On their face, the strategies the presidents have at their disposal might not be governed by zero-sum dynamics. However, the actions the president takes at any point in time are still limited by the president's available time. Even if the president chooses to act unilaterally and propose policy at the same time, he is still limited in terms of how much he can propose or enact because he still only spends so many hours of the day on policy. This means that it is necessary to understand the relationships between the different strategies, in part because decision making in regards to strategies requires the president to make trade-offs and compositional analysis helps us to understand why presidents favor certain strategies over others, as Dynamic Pie analysis illuminates the shifting relationships between different categories in response to external forces.

To test the hypotheses developed earlier in the chapter, we need to introduce a series of independent variables. The first variable is a measure of presidential approval. This measure comes from responses to the Gallup survey question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [the president] is handling his job as president?" Responses are aggregated to the quarterly

level to match the president's choice of policy strategy. The exact number of surveys that are included in the average changes overtime. In the early 1980s, this question was included on surveys approximately once a month. Over time, there has been a growth in the frequency of polling, so that by the Obama presidency, there is data about presidential approval almost every few days. A graph of presidential approval is available in the chapter appendix.

The next independent variables are the net number of seats for the president's party in the House and in the Senate. As I discussed earlier, these variables indicate not only whether the president's party has the majority in each chamber, but how large of a margin the president's party has. This variable is calculated by subtracting the number of seats the opposing party has from the number of seats occupied by the president's party. A positive value for this variable indicates that the president's party has the majority, while a negative number indicates that the president's party is in the minority. A graph of the net number of seats for the president's party in each chamber is available in the chapter appendix.

The next few independent variables of interest are quite simple. The third is the number of years since the last presidential election. This allows us to track the declining political capital presidents have in between elections. The second variable is a counter of the quarters of the year. This allows us to see how political capital changes over time within the year and assess how strategy might change over time in response. The final variable is the party of the president. I include this to see if there is a systematic difference in the

way Democratic and Republican presidents strategize their tool use.

5.4.1 Results

Compositional analysis, particularly the Dynamic Pie analysis in this study, requires examining the effect that independent variables have on the relationship between pairs of categories, in this case, pairs of strategies. The SUR framework with an error correction model produces estimates that are not directly interpretable (Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*), so I report the direction of the ratio using arrows. If the ratio is positive, I indicate that with an up arrow (⇑), which denotes that the strategy in the numerator is being prioritized more and the increased prioritization has caused the denominator strategy to be utilized less. If the ratio is negative, I use a down arrow (⇓), showing that the strategy in the denominator is being prioritized, with the additional attention coming from the numerator strategy. In the body of the chapter, I only report relationships that are significant at the 0.05 level, but in the appendix to the chapter, I report the coefficients and include indications of significance at both the 0.05 level and the 0.1 level.

When we look at Tables 5.1 and 5.2, we see confirmation for some of our expectations, but not all. The first expectation I had was that presidents with more public support would act unilaterally more because they have the trust of the public to support their decisions. What I found was that the president's approval rating has no statistically significant effect on the selection and prioritization of strategies in either the short or long term. This suggests

Table 5.2: Estimated Short-Term Effect on Presidential Strategy Selection by Quarter

Independent Variables	$\frac{Unilateral}{Shaping}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Shaping}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Unilateral}$
Net Seats in House			
Net Seats in Senate			
Quarter	⇓*	⇓*	⇓*
Years Since Election			
Percent Approval			
Democratic President	⇓*	⇓*	
R-squared	0.59	0.90	0.91

*: significant at 0.05 level

that the president's general strategy about how to approach policymaking is not tied to how well they are doing in the public opinion, as an increase in public support does not lead to the president selecting one strategy over any other. This is curious as we think that public opinion of the president is important.[6] This encourages us to turn to other explanations for a sense of what shapes the president's choice of strategies, particularly if it is not public approval.

Our second expectation was that presidents with greater levels of partisan support in the chambers of Congress would be more likely to prioritize the proposal strategy because presidents are more likely to get support for their ideas initially when they have more co-partisans in Congress. We find mixed support for this expectation. In the House of Representatives, an increase in the number of seats the president's party occupies produces no statistically

[6]The fact that Gallup now polls presidential approval weekly, if not multiple times a week, suggests that this is true.

Table 5.3: Estimated Long-Term Effect on Presidential Strategy Selection by Quarter

Independent Variables	$\frac{Unilateral}{Shaping}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Shaping}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Unilateral}$
Net Seats in House			
Net Seats in Senate	$\Uparrow$*	$\Uparrow$*	
Quarter	$\Downarrow$*		$\Downarrow$*
Years Since Election		$\Downarrow$*	$\Downarrow$*
Percent Approval			
Democratic President	$\Downarrow$*	$\Downarrow$*	
R-squared	0.59	0.90	0.91

*: significant at 0.05 level

significant effect in either the short- or the long-run. Yet, when we look at the Senate, we do find effects. In the short term, from one quarter to the next, we see that an increase in the number of seats has no effect on presidential strategy selection. The lack of short-term effects in both the House and Senate is not surprising as the membership of the chambers does not change much over the year. Instead, we must look at the long-term effects, as that is where we will find the impact of elections and any potential changes in chamber majorities. Elections can increase the number of seats controlled by the president's party, which has an effect on their strategic choices. An increase in the president's party control of the Senate, in the long run, leads the president to move away from the shaping strategy, instead choosing proposal tools and unilateral action tools. This suggests that, over time, increased support in the Senate frees the president to focus on either proposing policy for the House and Senate to act on or acting unilaterally, knowing that he is likely free from congressional interference.

The third expectation was that the first year after an election, the president would prioritize proposing policy because he has the political capital to persuade Congress to take up the issue. In the short term, as in from one year to the next, we find that the passage of time has no effect on presidential strategies, yet over the long term presidents prioritize shaping and unilateral action more than proposal strategies. This suggests that the effect of time since a president has been elected or re-elected is cumulative. The passage of time has no effect on the selection of different strategies from the first year to the second or the second to the third, but when we look at the long-term effect, from the first year following an election to the fourth year since an election, we see a significant de-prioritization of proposal tools. This suggests that as a president nears reelection or the end of his time in office, he stops proposing policy and starts trying to make his policy vision happen more directly, whether that is through unilateral action or shaping what is coming out of Congress. This is likely because as an election or the end of their time in office nears, presidents are hit with a sense of urgency; the need to complete their policy goals, as they might not have the power and time to try again later.

This result is actually quite interesting because of the way that the president's political capital declines with use. President's start their time in office riding the wave of support that brought them in to office. Typically, presidents start their time in office with the most support, the most flexibility,

the most political capital they will have their whole time in office.[7] Due to this maximal amount of political capital, presidents tend to be very thoughtful about the issues the prioritize at the beginning of their presidencies, as it is likely the best opportunity they will have to achieve their policy goals. As the term progresses, presidents make decisions about policy and politics that use up some of that support and political capital. That decline in leverage and capital makes it extremely interesting that late-term presidents will use shaping and unilateral action strategies more. It suggests that as re-election or the completion of the presidency nears, the president will try to take policy change in to their own hands because they are unable to cultivate the support and cooperation they need to propose policy, as other sources of political capital may be gone by this point.

Our fourth expectation was that presidents would propose more policy in the first quarter of the year because the start of the year traditionally involves annual events that lend themselves to agenda setting, such as the State of the Union and budget message. Our results were largely in line with this expectation. As the year progresses, we see a prioritization of the shaping strategy over unilateral action and proposal strategies, from one quarter to the next and from the first quarter of the year to the last, representing a prioritization of shaping policy over unilateral action and unilateral action over proposal strategies. This suggests that the earlier in the year it is, the

[7]Extreme circumstances, such as 9/11 with President G. W. Bush, can increase the amount of political capital a president has at a later point in office, but those circumstances are very rare.

more proposal tools are being used and as the year progresses, the shift towards other strategies.

Finally, we look at the difference in strategy selection between the two parties. We find is that Democratic presidents significantly prioritize shaping policy strategies in the late stage of the legislative process over unilateral action or proposal strategies. This might be a response to the fact that each of these presidencies spent three-fourths of their time in office with one or both chambers in the hands of the opposite party. Divided government meant that they couldn't rely on proposal tools to get what they want and that they were much likely to face resistance if they took unilateral action. Consequently, they used signing statements and veto threats more often as a way to get involved in the policy process.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how presidents utilize different strategies to respond to the circumstances they find themselves in. Presidents must be sensitive to environmental and political constraints, as presidents do not make policy in a vacuum. Policymaking is an interconnected process in which action provokes reaction. By being aware of and responsive to the circumstances they find themselves in, presidents increase their chances of success.

In every case, presidential decisions about policy strategy are a function of how they are processing information, in particular, information about their environments. They must constantly assess the amount of political capital they

have in Congress. They must also assess political time, whether that is their power in relation to the election cycle or the annual calendar of policymaking. They use all of that information to decide whether they can make one type of decision or another.

Yet the processing of all of that information is a difficult task, one in which presidents struggles to discern the true meaning of a piece of information. The process of understanding what a piece of information means and translating that meaning in to choice is vitally important for scholars to understand. It is also incredibly complex to study in the face of the disproportionate way presidents process and integrate new information. Presidents do not merely learn facts about the world and alter their strategies to fit them. Instead, there is friction and delay and mistakes arising out of cognitive and emotional limitations. This chapter seeks to understand a small slice of this process: how presidents use the general strategies they have at their disposal and what information about the political environment is most significant for making trade-offs between those strategies.

We can conclude a few things from this analysis. First, the graphical analysis in this chapter makes it startlingly clear that not only do presidents prefer to propose policy, it is also the strategy they pursue the most often. As easy as it might seem for presidents to get what they want by acting unilaterally or shaping policy coming out of Congress, it is something that they have to be judicious about. They can propose policy with relatively few risks, but if they want to shape policy they need Congress to have already

taken up the issue and if they want to act unilaterally, they need the confidence that they won't have problems from Congress or the courts. Proposing policy, might not always get them the policy change they want, but they also don't court as much risk.

Second, when we move to thinking about presidential strategy selection over time, rather than as a function of a whole presidency, we find that the choice of what strategy to pursue is not merely a function of ease of use, it is also a function of the time of the year. Presidents use unilateral action to varying degrees all the time, but proposing policy is primarily a first and second quarter of the year approach and shaping policy late in the legislative process is much more of a second, third, and fourth quarter of the year strategy.

When we look at the compositional analysis, we are able to understand a lot more about the trade-offs that presidents make between the strategies. First, we see that the relationship between the level of support the president has in the public and his actions are much more complicated than we had initially assumed. None of the relationships between the pairs of strategies are significant, suggesting that presidents don't make trade-offs between strategies with public approval directly in mind. So while trying to sell policy to the public may be important, the reaction they have to his attempts at persuasion don't seem to shape his strategy going forward, as the level of support he has doesnt determine when he goes public and when he tries to shape policy or act unilaterally. Going public via communication strategies and proposing policy might be in response to perceptions of support, but it isn't in response to an

actual increase in the level of support.

Another thing that we find from studying trade-off is that the relationship between the president and the House and Senate was more complex than we would have initially assumed. The fact that the House and Senate don't have an effect on presidential strategy in the short term was not terribly surprising, as there are two years in between substantial changes the amount of support the president has in either chamber. In the long term, the lack of any effect of the House of Representatives on the president, paired with a statistically significant effect in the Senate is quite interesting. It suggests partisan support in the Senate is much more influential for the presidents strategic choices. One explanation for this could be the difference in the voting rules in the House and Senate. In the House, the president needs things to get on the agenda, but once they do, he only needs a simple majority. Thus an increase in the size of his margin of support has little impact. Making policy in the Senate, in most cases, requires enough support to invoke cloture, raising the threshold of support that the president needs in the chamber. This means that the president's choice of strategy is much more sensitive to the margin of support he has in the Senate.

A third finding from the compositional analysis highlights the long-run effects that the number of years since the last election has on the president's choice of strategy. We find that in the early years of an administration, the president relies more on proposing policy, but as years pass and he is closer to reelection or the end of his time in office, there is an increase in the pri-

oritization of shaping legislation and using unilateral action strategies and a de-prioritization of proposal strategies. This comports with our expectation about presidential priorities, and thus strategy, changing as presidential time passes. The beginning of a term is the time to throw ideas out there and see what can get accomplished via Congress, but as election time approaches, the goal becomes securing his legacy and completing policy, whether by acting alone or by shaping policy as it nears the end of the legislative calendar. The same is true across the course of a single year; the first months of the year are for proposing policy, but as the year progresses it is all about completing policy. Presidents get credit for policy change that actually gets completed, while proposals that die along the way get completely forgotten. Additionally, presidents gain knowledge and experience about what will work each time they set out to make policy. Over time, the lessons about efficacy and successful policy change accumulate. Later in a term, presidents are going to rely more heavily on tools and strategies they feel are more effective, while reduce the amount of "wasted" time on proposing policy.

These findings leave us with a few questions to consider. The first question that is one that I also raised in the last chapter: how much are these results a function of the president's studied? Particularly when we talk about the effect the House and Senate have on presidential strategy, how much of these effects are a product of the large stretches of divided government during the period of this study? As I noted earlier in the chapter, only 8 of the 34 years in this sample were under unified government. Could periods with unified

government and larger margins either for or against the president's party lead to the president to prioritize more proposal tools? Or would the presence of intra-party factions during those periods keep the president's ability to propose policy limited like it is in this dissertations time period?

Additionally, the lack of effect the level of partisan support in the House on presidential prioritization raises an interesting question. The president needs party support in order to get his proposed policies through the committee system, on to the floor, and passed into law. Yet as we saw in this analysis, the net number of seats in the House of Representatives had no effect on presidential strategy. Is this always true, or perhaps the policy area has an effect on the relationship between the president and the House of Representatives? In the next chapter when we break out the trade-offs by policy area and stage, we will see if support in the House of Representatives has any effect in any other policy area.

In the next chapter, we will bring together the two stages of decision making that we have talked about in the last chapter and in this chapter, issue prioritization and strategy selection, to understand the effect that each has on the other in the decision-making process. Presidential decision-making requires understanding how presidents unite information about what policy area to address with which strategy will be most effective given the political context. In considering both policy area and strategy at the same time, we will get a better view in to how the process is much more iterative, and less linear, which is the way we have been thinking about the process up until now.

Chapter 6

Policy-Strategy Decision Making: Analyzing Presidential Decision Making With Both Policy Prioritization and Strategy Selection

The process of making policy is a process of learning: learning what strategies you should use in which policy areas. All presidents are forced to learn, sooner or later, that they can't use the same tool to achieve all of their policy goals. One example of this was during the 104th Congress. During those two years, President Clinton both succeeded and failed to use veto threats, a tool within the category of the shaping strategy, to get his preferred policy change. President Clinton succeeded in June of 1995, when he used a series of veto threats to object to the removal of family planning assistance the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1996 (H.R. 1868). It took five separate threats from June until December of 1995 for Congress to remove the objectionable language, allowing him to sign the bill on February 12, 1996. These veto threats gave the president a say in the final form of the legislation.

Only a few months later, President Clinton was forced to use his veto power, after his threats failed to get the change he desired on the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 1995. In the lead up to the April 10, 1996 veto, he issued

two veto threats, one on November 11, 1995 and one on December 6th, in which he said that

> The Administration cannot support H.R. 1833 because it fails to provide for consideration of the need to preserve the life and health of the mother, consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade. If the bill is not amended to rectify these constitutional defects, the Attorney General and the White House Counsel will recommend that the President veto the bill.

Despite that strong statement, the House and Senate passed the legislation. President Clinton was forced to follow through on his threat and veto the bill.

What was so different between these two situations? In this two year period, neither the policy environment nor the political environment had radically changed. One obvious difference between these two cases was the policy area. When the president tried to make policy about international affairs he was able to use a veto threat, but when he tried to use it in domestic policy his efforts failed.

The past two chapters have focused on analyzing the two main components of presidential decision making: the policies presidents prioritize and the strategies they select. In reality, these decisions occur simultaneously. Presidents do not decide to prioritize issues without thinking about the strategies they might use, nor do they devise strategy without a policy area in mind. Instead, presidential decision making is characterized by the constant, simultaneous decision about policies and strategies. In order to truly understand

presidential decision making and information processing, scholars must study the combined choices that presidents make. This chapter follows the progression of this dissertation towards understanding how presidents make decisions about policy, by analyzing simultaneous policy prioritization and strategy selection.

In this chapter, we will consider how both the policy environment and the political environment can unveil new aspects of the decisions that presidents make to prioritize policies and select strategies. This analysis is largely exploratory, building upon the expectations that drove the previous empirical chapters, in order to learn how presidential decision making varies across both policies and strategies. In order to learn how presidents make decisions about both policy and strategy, this chapter will examine the distribution of presidential attention across the five macro-policy areas,[1] in each of the three tool strategies.[2] After studying the distribution of attention to policy in each strategy by president and over time, the chapter examines the ways presidents use information about the political and policy environment to make trade-offs between the policy areas in each of the strategies. I find that presidential decision making about policy and strategy is complex, requiring the president to pay attention to a large number of competing factors, many of which have different effects on his decisions, depending on the strategy and the decision making environment. Presidential decision making in the proposal strategy

[1]Which are the economy, international affairs, social welfare, government operations, and other domestic policy

[2]Which are proposal, shaping, and unilateral action

is sensitive to the amount of support they have in the House, Senate, and public, the level of unemployment, defense spending, and the party of the president. The president is less reactive to information in the shaping strategy, though they are systematically affected by the amount of support they have in the House of Representatives and defense spending. In the unilateral action strategy, there is a resurgent role for information, particularly for information about the political environment, as the amount of support in the House, Senate, and public, the number of years since the last election, and the party of the president all have widespread effects on the way presidents prioritize information.

6.1 When Policies Met Politics: Expectations of Presidential Prioritization of Policy Areas and Strategies

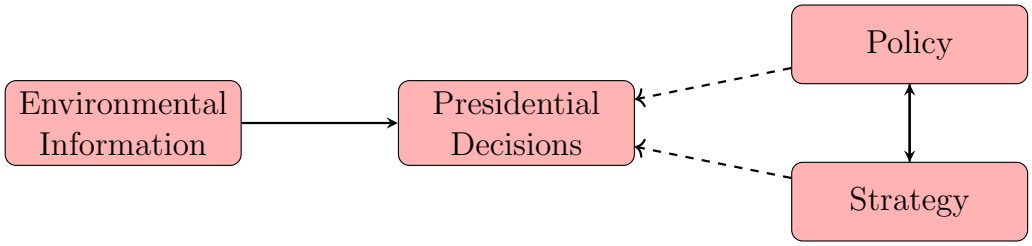
The focus of the last two chapters has been on understanding the two components of presidential decision making individually: policy prioritization, in chapter 4, and strategy selection, in chapter 5. By studying them separately, it was possible to learn how presidents process information about each of these components. This was an important step in developing this research, as the results from the simpler analysis provides a foundation for the more complex, but more realistic analysis in this chapter.

In this chapter, we are interested in answering the same questions as we were in the previous two chapters: what policies/strategies do presidents prioritize and what shapes the trade-offs between policy areas/strategies? How-

ever, in this chapter, instead of examining the prioritization of policy across all strategies or between strategies across the policy areas, we will examine the way policies are prioritized in each of the three strategies. By studying the way policy is used and juggled in each of the three strategies, we are able to learn a number of different things. First, we can learn how the different policies are used in each strategy and answer many questions, such as whether international affairs makes up an equal proportion of a presidents attention in all three strategies, or does its importance, relative to the other policy areas, shift across strategies? Second, we can learn the relative relationships between policy areas in a single strategy across different presidents, enabling us to observe whether behavior by one president is significantly different from the other presidents or if all presidents use a particular strategy to tackle a particular policy area in the same way. Finally, this stage-by-stage analysis lets us see how the same information causes presidents to make different trade-offs between policy areas. When the same piece of information produces different trade-offs, we get a window into how strategies provide their own information for presidential decision-making.

All of this analysis allows us to understand how policy and strategies shape each other. This joint decision, about what policy to prioritize via which strategy, is called the *policy-strategy decision*. This term denotes the fact that, contained within each decision the president makes, are decisions about which policies to prioritize and what strategy to use to pursue the policy. I expect that there will be substantial differences in the way that

Figure 6.1: Policy-Strategy Decision Making



presidents pay attention to and prioritize policy across the three strategies, as each strategy involves different tools and interacts with a different part of the policy making process. These differences result in decision makers applying information differently in each of the different strategies.

In the policy-strategy decision, which is diagrammed in Figure 6.1, presidential decisions are affected by three quantities: information about the political and policy environment, policies, and strategies. At the center of all decision making is the president. He must process information about the policy and political environment and balance that with information about policies and strategies. Decisions about policies and strategies must be weighed against each other, as the choice of strategy can limit the choice of policy and vis versa, as not every strategy can be used for every policy and not every policy is best approached through every strategy.[3] Presidents have to use their knowledge about policies and strategies, their strengths and weaknesses, and the political and policy environments to decide what policy to pursue via

[3]This flexible ordering is denoted by the dotted lines connecting policy and strategy with the president.

which strategy.

In this model of decision making, information is continually shaping the process, with each component providing more information, forcing the president to make trade-offs between policies and strategies in the pursuit of his policy goals. This chapter will explore the policy-strategy decision and how information about the policy and political environment causes the president to make different trade-offs between policy areas in each of the three strategies.

6.1.1 A Review of Policy Areas and Strategies

Before we can engage in the in-depth analysis of policy-strategy decisions, it is worthwhile reviewing the different policy areas and strategies at play. In chapter 4, we learned how presidents make decisions about which policy areas to prioritize. The five macro topic policy areas in this study are the economy, international affairs, government operations, social welfare, and other domestic policy.

I had hypothesized that presidents would prioritize three types of policies: first, Constitutional responsibilities, such as international affairs and government operations; the economy; and political party-related issues. To learn about how presidents made trade-offs between policy areas, I introduced a series of independent variables to understand how aspects of the policy environment informed presidential decision-making. These independent variables give a sense of the state of policy problems in the policy-making environment.

I found that presidents do consistently prioritize their constitutional

issues, regularly prioritizing those policy areas that are delegated to the president. I also found that, while all presidents pay at least some attention to economics, the presidents that pay the most attention are those who are faced with large economic crises. Finally, while I found that there were substantive differences in the agendas of Democratic and Republican presidents, those priorities were not in line with issue ownership theory.

In chapter 5, the goal was to analyze how presidents use the three general strategies and information about the political environment in order to make trade-offs between the strategies. The three general strategies in this study are the *proposal* strategy, *shaping* strategy, and *unilateral action* strategy. These three strategies involve the president in different aspects of the policy process and have different strengths and weaknesses for action.

The expectations in this chapter were that the political environment, specifically the amount of support and political capital that the president had, would be instrumental in shaping the decisions about what strategies to select. I expected that the more public support the president had, the more they would rely on unilateral action. I also expected that congressional support would cause presidents to rely on proposing policy. Finally, I expected that the longer it had been since a presidential election and the later it is in the legislative year, the more that the president would rely on shaping and unilateral action. To learn about how presidents make those trade-offs, I introduced a series of independent variable to understand how political support and timing provide information about the political environment.

In the fifth chapter, I found that, by and large, the political environment has little effect on the selection of strategy, as public support has no effect on presidential strategy selection. It is also possible to see that the effect of support in Congress is only significant for presidential decision-making in the Senate and only over the long-term, suggesting that presidents are far more independent in their selection of strategy than they are reliant on the support of other actors. The one area of the political environment that has a substantial significant effect on decision making is time. Both time within the year and time since the last election were statistically significant. As the year progresses, presidents become more likely to favor shaping and unilateral action strategies, rather than the proposal strategy and as the number of years since the last presidential election increases, the more presidents favor shaping and unilateral action strategies, rather than the proposal strategy, but only over the long run. These findings illustrate that the effect of the political world on presidential decision making is far more nuanced than we presume.

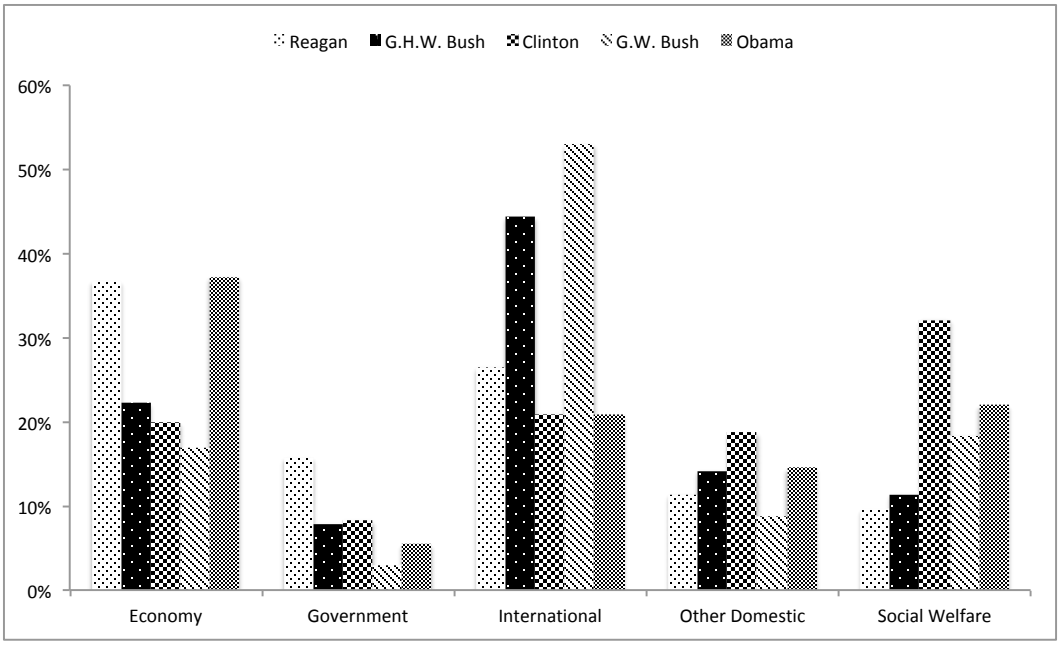
One concern stemming from both these chapter revolved around the fact that these results might change in different policies or strategies. Presidents may pay attention to policy one way in the proposal strategy, but an entirely different way in the unilateral action or shaping strategies. Only by looking at how presidents prioritize policy and make trade-offs between them in each strategy, can we comprehensively understand presidential decision-making.

6.2 Graphically Analyzing Policy-Strategy Decisions

6.2.1 Policy-Strategy Decisions Across Presidents

When we examine the way presidents prioritize policy areas on average across their whole presidencies in the different strategies, we immediately see, in Figures 6.2 through 6.4, that presidents use the strategies differently, to focus on some policies more in some strategies, and less in others. President Reagan used the proposal strategy, more than the shaping or unilateral action strategies, to prioritize the economy, the shaping strategy to deal with government operations and other domestic policy, unilateral action to deal with social welfare, and proposal and unilateral action in roughly equal proportions to deal with international affairs. President G.H.W. Bush used the proposal strategy the most to deal with the economy and international affairs, the shaping strategy to deal with government operations and other domestic policy, and unilateral action to deal with social welfare policy. President Clinton utilized the proposal strategy the most of the three strategies when focusing on the economy and social welfare policy, shaping strategy for government operations, and the unilateral action strategy for international affairs and other domestic policy. President G.W. Bush uses the proposal strategy more than the others for the economy, international affairs, and social welfare, the shaping strategy for government operations, and the unilateral action strategy for other domestic policy. President Obama used the proposal strategy the most for the economy and social welfare, shaping policy for government operations, and unilateral action for international affairs and other domestic policy. While

Figure 6.2: Proposal Strategy Presidential Attention, by President and Policy Area



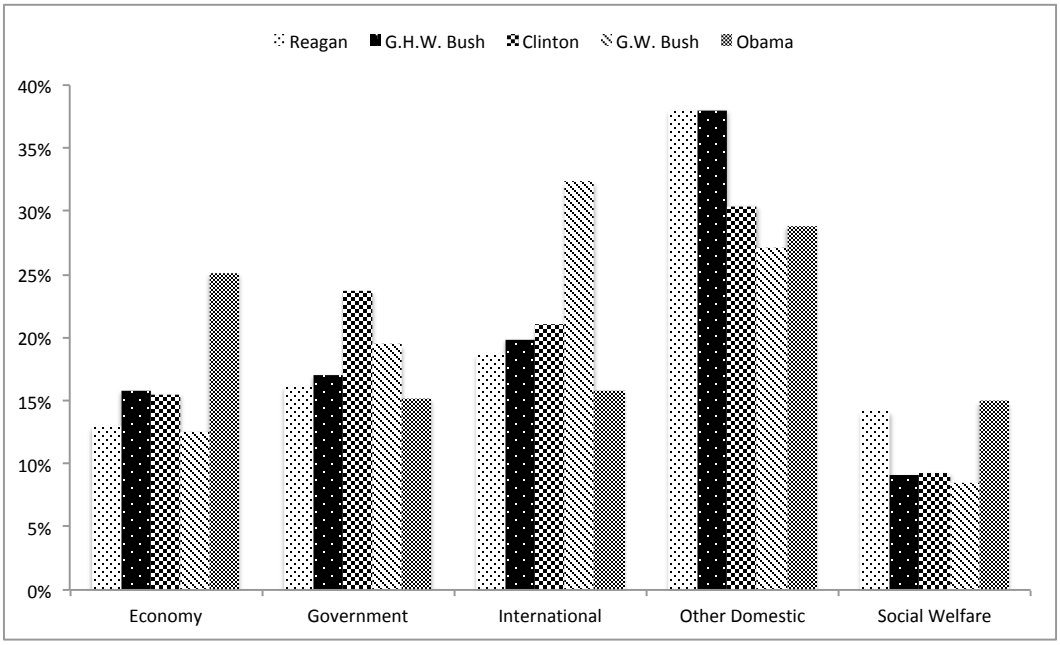
there are some commonalities between the most utilized strategies for each policy area, such as the fact that all five presidents use the proposal strategy the most when they want to prioritize the economy, there are also differences, such as the fact that some presidents use the proposal strategy the most for international affairs, while other presidents use the unilateral action strategy the most.

When I look at the prioritization of policy areas within each of the different strategies, some observations arise. First, in the proposal stage (Figure 6.2), most presidents emphasize international affairs and the economy, although there is considerable variability, with Presidents Reagan and Obama

paying the most attention to the economy and the President Bushes paying the most attention to international affairs. This repeats the pattern that we saw in chapter 4, that presidents prioritize issues in part because of constitutional obligations and public expectations, and part in response to policy problems such as recessions and wars. Yet presidents also use the proposal strategy in other ways, such as to pay substantial attention to social welfare policy, as was done by Presidents Clinton (32.1%) and Obama (22%). This suggests that, at the proposal stage, presidents mostly stick to those policy areas in line with what the job requires, but that they will propose policy in other areas when they feel strongly about the issue. It is quite interesting that, by and large, presidents only use the strategy to deal with government operation and other domestic policy a little. It suggests that presidents engage with these policy areas more in other strategies, perhaps because the other strategy types are more effective for enacting policy change than proposing policy in thees areas.

In the shaping stage, we see a much different distribution of attention. Instead of seeing a focus on constitutionally-mandated policy or economics, we see, in Figure 6.3, that the prioritization of policy areas is much more complex and individualized. In government and international affairs, we see that most presidents prioritized these issues a moderate amount (between 15.2% and 23.7% for government operations and 15.9% and 32.3% for international affairs). Yet each area has an exception: for government operations, President Clinton prioritized the issue 23.7% of the time, which is 4.2% more than the next highest president. For international affairs, President G.W. Bush priori-

Figure 6.3: Shaping Strategy Presidential Attention, by President and Policy Area

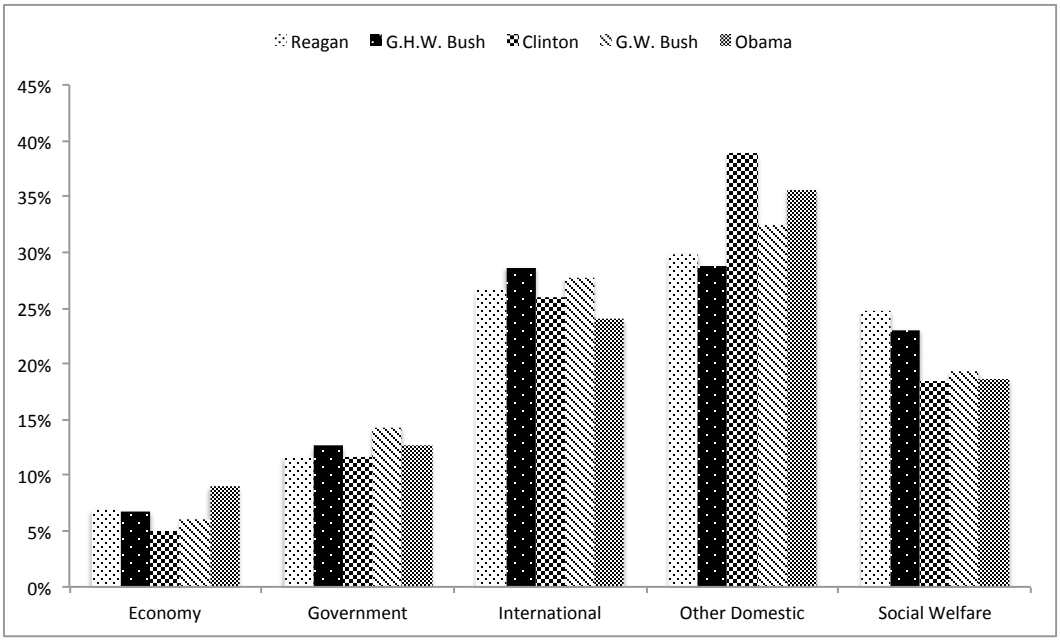


tized the issue 32.3%, which is 11.3% more than the next highest president. It is also interesting because, when we looked at this prioritization in Chapter 4, both President Bushes substantially prioritized international affairs, but here only G.W. Bush prioritizes the issue more than other presidents. This suggest that G.H.W. Bush was able to get what he wanted via proposing policy, while G.W. had to use both proposal and shaping strategy in order to get the outcomes he wanted.

In the economy, we see similar use across all presidents (12.6% to 15.8%), except for President Obama who used this strategy for this policy area 25.1% of the time. This is almost 10.9% more than the average of the other presidents. This difference might be in part because of the fact that he had to deal with a large financial crisis combined with the increased level of party polarization from the last time there was a major financial crisis during the Reagan administration. Under President Obama, the financial crisis and its policy solutions were very politicized, requiring President Obama to use the shaping strategy much more, while President Reagan could simply propose what he wanted and, even though he had a Democratic Congress, they were more willing to listen to his ideas and work towards bipartisan solutions.

In other domestic policy and social welfare, we see very different outcomes. Presidents use shaping tools only in a minimally in the social welfare, with President Obama using them the most at 15% and G.W. Bush the least at 8.5%, but all presidents using shaping tools extensively in other domestic policy, with Presidents G.H.W. Bush and Reagan using them the most at 38%

Figure 6.4: Unilateral Action Strategy Presidential Attention, by President and Policy Area



and G.W. Bush using them the least at 27.1%. This is curious as the analysis in neither chapters 4 nor 5 would have predicted this pairing of policy and strategy. Perhaps this high level of shaping occurs because presidents do not have any Constitutional responsibility in other domestic policy. Consequently, they let Congress take the lead on these issues and get involved if they need to because of a disagreement with Congress's solution.

When we look at Figure 6.4 to understand how presidents prioritize policy attention in the unilateral action strategy, we see presidents use the strategy more in two primary policy areas: first in international affairs, as that is a policy area in which they have the primary policy making role, and

second, in policy areas where presidents think that there is no other way to get the change they desire, such as other domestic policy and social welfare. Given the fact that the presidency was created to offer a unified front for international affairs, it is not surprising that all presidents prioritize international affairs at roughly the same level (24% to 28.7%) for unilateral action. When we look at other domestic policy (28.8% to 38.9%) and social welfare (18.4% to 24.8%), we see presidents taking action unilaterally in order to ensure their preferred policy outcomes. These areas are much more difficult for presidents to influence via proposal or shaping tools, though of course they still try. Ultimately, when the president wants to get involved in policy making, unilateral action is an appealing approach because of the swift and uncompromising policy change that occurs.

6.2.2 Policy-Strategy Decisions Across Time

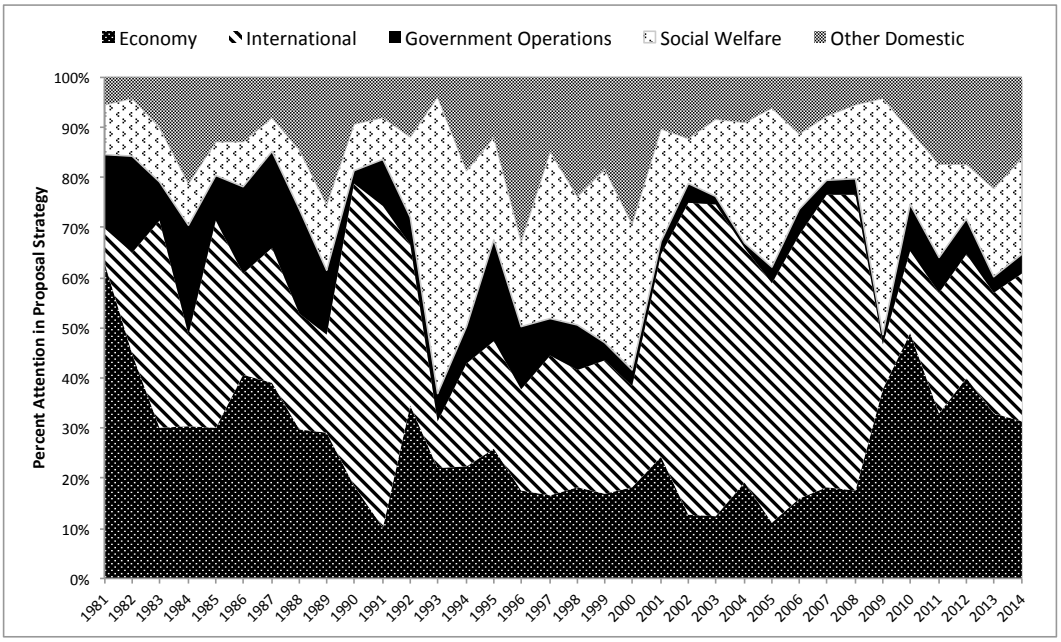
In examining presidential policy-strategy decisions across time, the unit of time is the year, rather than the quarter as it was in past chapters. The annual level helps to simplify the complex dynamics that occur when we look at five different policy areas across three different strategies. At the quarterly level the data becomes zero-inflated. Because there are so many quarters in which the president doesn't take action in some of the policy areas, it is impossible to estimate a model for the proposal strategy. While other analysis techniques can handle data with a high quantity of zeros, the Dynamic Pie approach does not, and the strength of this approach, namely the ability to

handle pairs of categories for the dependent variable, is significant enough that it is worthwhile moving to a higher unit of time.

When we look at policy prioritization across time and strategies, we see much more nuance then when we looked at the presidency. The first thing we see is that there are some strategies where the distribution of policy priorities is more stable across time, and others that are more subject to fluctuation. Proposal (Figure 6.5) and shaping (Figure 6.6) strategies reflect regularly shifting priorities over time. The unilateral action stage (Figure 6.7) shows that presidents use the strategy for each policy area in roughly the same amount all the time and that, over time, changes are more incremental, rather than subject to the same kind of huge trade-offs between policy areas that we see occurring in the other strategies.

In the proposal stage, there are large shifts in what policies the presidents are prioritizing. While the largest shifts occur when there is a change in the president, there are substantial re-prioritization of policy within presidencies. Two of the biggest changes we see are in the Clinton and Obama presidencies. In 1993 and 2009, there are large shifts towards social welfare, followed in the next year by the re-prioritization of other issues, such as other domestic policy in Clinton and the economy in Obama. In the Reagan administration, the first year was marked by substantial attention to the economy, but over time, other areas, such as international affairs and other domestic policy, came to be a bigger part of President Reagan's agenda. President G.H.W. Bush's proposal strategy was used primarily to focus on international

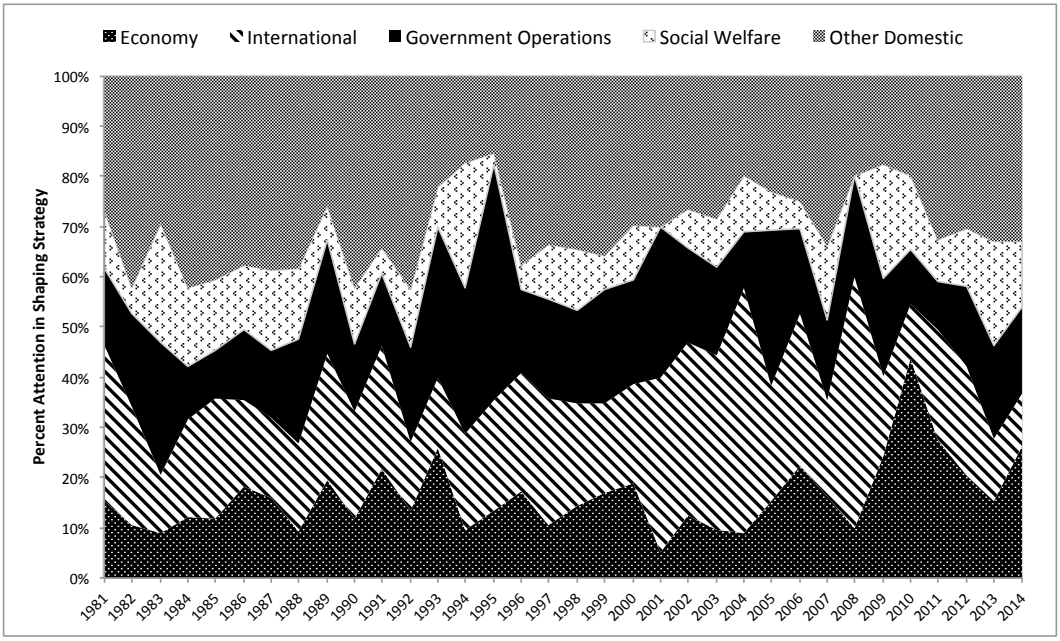
Figure 6.5: Proposal Strategy Presidential Attention to Policy



affairs, though in the first and last year in office he paid more attention to the economy. During the G.W. Bush administration, the president also used the proposal tool to talk about international affairs, but right after he was reelected he slightly de-prioritized the issue in order to increase attention to social welfare policy, specifically because of his interest in reforming social security.

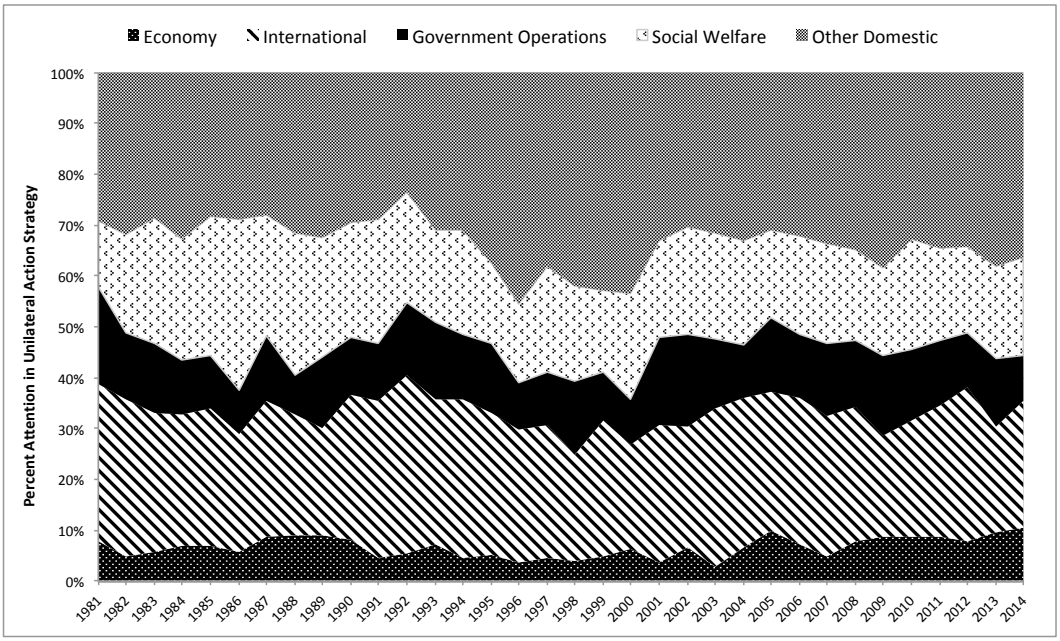
When we look at prioritization across time in the shaping strategy, we see some substantial trade-offs in policy attention, where individual policy areas dominate the agenda before receding. During President Reagan's time in office, he made trade-offs between social welfare, international affairs, other domestic policy, and government operations, so that, for example in

Figure 6.6: Shaping Strategy Presidential Attention to Policy



1983, when he increased the amount of attention for government operations and social welfare, it came from the reduction of attention to other domestic policy and international affairs. In the G.H.W. Bush administration, the economy and other domestic policy changed the most over time, rising and falling on the agenda, creating space for the other policy areas. During the Clinton administration, government operations got prioritized at the expense of other policy areas in the shaping strategy. During the G.W. Bush presidency international affairs played a substantial role, though it was not immune from being re-prioritized like it was in the proposal strategy. President Obama shifted attention from social welfare to the economy and other domestic policy over the course of his presidency. It is also noteworthy how other domestic

Figure 6.7: Unilateral Action Strategy Presidential Attention to Policy



policy remains a substantial part of the agenda within the shaping strategy overtime. Other domestic policy takes up anywhere between 15.6% and 45.5% of the presidents shaping agenda, with an average of 30.6%, sometimes leaving only minimal room for each of the other four policy areas.

In the unilateral action strategy, the amount of attention that presidents pay to each policy area is comparatively stable over time. Each president pays a pretty consistent amount of attention to each policy area, with any changes in the amount of attention an issue received relatively minor compared with the overall trend in Figure 6.7, which shows that the economy is 2.8% to 10.6% of the unilateral action strategy, international affairs is 19.8% to 35%, government operations is 7.8% to 19.3%, social welfare is 12.9% to

33.5%, and other domestic policy is 23.5% to 45.5%. The results across Figures 6.5 through 6.7 suggest an important role for timing, not just in the choice of policy area or strategy, but in the joint decision of what strategy to pursue in which policy area.

6.3 Making Trade-Offs: Compositional Analysis of Policy-Strategy Decisions

As we have already seen in the graphical analysis in this chapter, it is very important to break down the analysis of trade-offs by strategy. To do this, we will examine the effect that the policy environment and the political environment have on the prioritization of policy in each of the different strategies. As a reminder, Dynamic Pie analysis allows us to examine the effect that independent variables have on pairs of categories, which in this chapter are pairs of policy areas. By modeling the effect of the political and policy environment, utilizing all the independent variables that were in the previous chapters, in the three separate models, one for each of the three general strategies, we can see the effect that information about the environment has on the joint policy-strategy decision-making process.

Dynamic Pie analysis produces estimates in both the long- and short-run that are not directly interpretable (Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*). Consequently, I report the directionality of the result using arrows. If the estimated coefficient is positive, it is indicated with an up arrow ($\Uparrow$), which denotes that the strategy in the numerator is being prioritized more and the

increased prioritization has caused the denominator strategy to be utilized less. If the coefficient is negative, it is indicated with a down arrow (⇓), showing that the strategy in the denominator is being prioritized, with the additional attention coming from the numerator strategy. In the body of the chapter, only significant relationships at the 0.05 level are reported, but in the appendix to the chapter, are tables of coefficients that include indications of significance at both the 0.05 level and the 0.1 level.

It is important to recognize what short- and long-term effects mean in this analysis. In this analysis, the unit of time is a year. Short term effects are those that affect the analysis from one year to the next. Long term effects are those that affect the overall trend. For example, if we looked at the first two lines of Table 6.1, we would see the short- and long-term effects the number of seats the president's party in the House of Representatives has on pairs of policies in the proposal strategy. We can see that, from one year to the next, an increase in the number of seats the president's party possesses is likely to cause the president to prioritize social welfare over international affairs, government operations over international affairs, the economy over international affairs, social policy over other domestic policy, economics over other domestic policy, and government operations over other domestic policy. Yet, when we consider the long-term trend in prioritization that is caused by an increased number of seats for the president's party in the House of Representatives, we see that the president prioritizes social welfare policy over economics, social welfare policy over international affairs, and social welfare policy over other domestic policy.

In this case, the long term trend of the independent variable had a much narrower, specific effect on policy prioritization in the proposal strategy, than that same information has on presidential prioritization from year to year.

In this chapter, three models, one for each strategy, include all the independent variables from the prior analyses. This include the policy environmental indicators and the political environmental indicators: percent GDP change, unemployment level, party of the president, number of seats for the president's party in the House and Senate, public approval of the president, and number of years since the last election.[4] Using these variables, we can see how different types of information influence the president's prioritization of policy in the three different strategies.

6.3.1 Results

The results from the compositional analysis in Tables 6.1-6.3, are extremely intricate; it is very easy to get overwhelmed by the complexity of the results. As such, the focus of this chapter is not on the individual trade-offs in every variable in every strategy in both the short- and the long-run in this chapter. Instead, this section will summarize the findings; examining the general effect that policy and political environment has on the prioritization of policy in the different strategies and highlight particularly interesting results.

The first thing that is apparent in the results in Tables 6.1 to 6.3

[4]For justification and descriptions of the independent variables, see chapter 4 and 5.

is that different strategies are significantly influenced by different kinds of information. The proposal strategy is influenced by both information about the policy environment, notably by unemployment, defense spending, and the party of the president, and by information about the political environment, specifically the number of seats the president's party has in the House and Senate and the amount of public approval. The number of years since the last presidential elections has some effects, but they are less profound.

The shaping strategy, in Table 6.2, shows a far weaker role for information in policy prioritization. In this strategy, the only independent variables that have substantial effects are: the number of seats the president's party has in the House, which causes presidents to de-prioritize other domestic policy in favor of all the other policy areas, and defense spending, which encourages presidents to prioritize the economy, international affairs, and other domestic policy. This result is really interesting as it shows that presidents are not immune to both policy and political information, but that it has a limited role in shaping priorities in the shaping strategy. This is likely because this strategy is the only one in which the president is reliant on other's actions. Given that a president can not shape policy until it has been created by Congress, his choice of policies to prioritize is less reliant on the kinds of policy and political information that are in this analysis, and more reliant on prior action. It may be possible to get a clearer causal mechanism in a future piece of scholarship that focuses on the shaping strategy and includes a measure of congressional attention at a prior point in time to each policy area.

Table 6.1: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Proposal Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Seats in House-Short				$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$
Seats in House-Long	$\Uparrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$			$\Uparrow^*$			
Seats in Senate-Short	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Seats in Senate-Long							$\Downarrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$
Approval-Short							$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	
Approval-Long				$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Years since Last Election-Short								$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$
Years since Last Election-Long								$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
% GDP Change-Short									$\Downarrow^*$	
% GDP Change-Long				$\Downarrow^*$					$\Downarrow^*$	
Unemployment-Short				$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$				
Unemployment-Long	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$
Defense Spending-Short				$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$			$\Uparrow^*$	
Defense Spending-Long		$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Democratic President	$\Uparrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$		
R-Squared	0.777	0.693	0.711	0.860	0.651	0.673	0.872	0.835	0.739	0.696

*: significant at 0.05 level

Table 6.2: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Shaping Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Seats in House-Short							$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$		
Seats in House-Long							$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$
Seats in Senate-Short		$\Downarrow^*$								
Seats in Senate-Long										
Approval-Short									$\Uparrow^*$	
Approval-Long					$\Uparrow^*$					
Years since Last										
Election-Short					$\Uparrow^*$					
Years since Last										
Election-Long				$\Uparrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$			
% GDP Change-Short							$\Uparrow^*$			
% GDP Change-Long										
Unemployment-Short										
Unemployment-Long										
Defense Spending-Short				$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$
Defense Spending-Long		$\Uparrow^*$			$\Uparrow^*$					$\Downarrow^*$
Democratic President							$\Downarrow^*$			
R-Squared	0.788	0.713	0.753	0.791	0.754	0.583	0.889	0.757	0.732	0.795

*: significant at 0.05 level

Table 6.3: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Unilateral Action Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Seats in House-Short								$\Uparrow^*$		
Seats in House-Long			$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$					$\Uparrow^*$
Seats in Senate-Short	$\Uparrow^*$					$\Uparrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$		
Seats in Senate-Long			$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$					$\Downarrow^*$
Approval-Short				$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$	
Approval-Long	$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$			$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Years since Last Election-Short			$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Years since Last Election-Long					$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
% GDP Change-Short		$\Uparrow^*$				$\Downarrow^*$				
% GDP Change-Long		$\Uparrow^*$								$\Downarrow^*$
Unemployment-Short Unemployment-Long					$\Downarrow^*$			$\Uparrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$
Defense Spending-Short Defense Spending-Long	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$				$\Downarrow^*$		$\Uparrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
Democratic President					$\Uparrow^*$	$\Uparrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$	$\Downarrow^*$		$\Downarrow^*$
R-Squared	0.746	0.626	0.724	0.661	0.837	0.695	0.777	0.696	0.605	0.803

*: significant at 0.05 level

The unilateral action strategy, in Table 6.3, is somewhat in between the shaping strategy and the proposal strategy as to how much of an effect information has on policy prioritization. The political environment variables have a more robust effect, with the number of seats in the House and Senate, public approval, and the length of time since the last presidential election having repeated influence on policy prioritization. That does not mean that the policy environmental variables are insignificant; in general they have a more limited effect, focused on particular pairs of policies, but defense spending in the long term has a significant effect on a number of different policy trade-offs.

Besides these general differences between the three strategies, there are some other findings that are quite interesting. One of these findings is the role the president's party plays in policy trade-offs. In the analysis in chapter 4, being a Democrat caused presidents to de-prioritize international affairs in favor of government operations and other domestic policy.[5] In this chapter, when we break out the effect of party by strategy, the results are very different. First, the extent to which party has any affect at all varies by strategy; in the shaping strategy, there is only one trade-off where party has a significant effect. In the proposal and unilateral action strategies, the effects of party are more pervasive, with four trade-offs in the proposal strategy and five trade-offs in the unilateral action strategy significantly shaped by party. Second, the particular policy areas that are prioritized because of party change across

[5]See Tables 4.1 and 4.2

the three strategies. In the proposal strategy, Democratic presidents prioritize social welfare, other domestic policy, and government operations over international affairs and economics. In the shaping stage, Democratic presidents prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare. Finally in unilateral action, we see Democratic presidents prioritize international affairs and other domestic policies over government operations, economics, and social welfare. The reversal of international affairs from being an issue that is de-prioritized in the proposal strategy to a policy that is prioritized in the unilateral action strategy is incredibly interesting as it highlights how much presidents tailor their choice of policy strategically. We see this dynamic occur in other areas, such as in the effect of the Senate,[6] the effect of public approval,[7] and the effect of defense spending,[8] all in the long run.

Another interesting finding from the compositional analysis revolves around the way information about the political environment affects decision making, specifically the different effect that congressional support has on presidential policy prioritization across the three strategies. In chapter 5, the

[6]An increase in the number of seats held in the Senate by the president's party in the proposal and unilateral action strategies causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over international affairs, but in the shaping strategy causes presidents to prioritize international affairs over other domestic policy

[7]An increase in public approval for the president in the proposal strategy causes presidents to prioritize international affairs over social welfare and in the unilateral action strategy causes presidents to prioritize social welfare over international affairs. Public approval has no statistically significant effect on prioritization in the shaping strategy.

[8]An increase in defense spending causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over the economy in the proposal strategy, the economy over other domestic policy in the unilateral action strategy, and there is no statistically significant effect in the shaping strategy.

expectation was that congressional support would allow presidents to prioritize the proposal strategy. In that chapter, which didn't distinguish between policy areas, the results indicated that the only congressional variable that had a statistically significant effect on presidential strategy selection was in the amount of support the president's party had in the Senate in the long run, and that support made presidents more likely to select the unilateral and proposal strategies over the shaping strategy. In this chapter, where policy prioritization is separated out by strategy, there is a very different result. Here, the support the president has in the House and Senate are both important, but have different effects in all three strategies. In the proposal strategy, congressional support leads the president to prioritize social policy (over economic policy and international affairs) when there is both House and Senate support, and leads the president to de-prioritize international affairs with support only in the House, and other domestic policy when there is support only in the Senate. In the shaping strategy, the Senate has very little effect, but increases in the number of seats the president's party has in the House causes presidents to de-prioritize other domestic policy. The unilateral action strategy looks much more like the proposal strategy, where congressional support leads to a prioritization of social welfare policy. These results are interesting as they show how the political environment can have different effect on the policy prioritization in the different strategies.

These results, and the many others discussed in the chapter appendix, illustrate the complicated way that presidents process information and use

what they have learned to make decisions about different policies and strategies. The effect of information is neither static nor is it applied uniformly. Presidents use the information that they have about policy and politics and think about the policy areas and strategies at their disposal to try and make the best decisions, the one that gets them closer to their policy goals. Sometimes that means that they must prioritize some policies via one strategy rather than another, and sometimes it means that they can use whatever strategy their like in order to achieve their goals.

6.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, we looked at the way strategies and policy areas interact to shed light on the complexity of presidential decision-making. Across the three strategies and five policy areas, we find some similar patterns, but also many differences that are worth trying to understand. Nowhere is this clearer than in the compositional analysis, which helps us understand presidential trade-offs. If we look across the three strategies, we can see instances where the same independent variable produced opposite effects in the different strategies, for example, when we look at the effect the president's party has on their decisions. This is a signal that it is incredibly important to consider the president's policy prioritization across the different strategies, as we had simply stopped at the aggregate analysis in chapter 4, we never would have learned that the effect that the party has on decision-making is as complex. There are times when presidents prioritize and de-prioritize the same issue and it largely

depends on the strategy they are using to pursue it.

In this chapter, we also learned a great deal more about policy prioritization by looking at the policy strategies individually. Without the combined analysis, we would not have been able to understand just how differently a role information plays in the shaping strategy than in the proposal and unilateral action strategies. The information that routinely shapes the prioritization of policy areas in the proposal and unilateral action strategies has only a limited effect in the shaping strategy. In the unilateral action strategy, the state of the policy environment has an effect on presidential priorities, but primarily in the long run. When presidents act on their own, they seem to approach information about the policy environment with more caution, causing it to have an effect more often in the long run, rather than the short run.

When it comes to understanding the effect that the political world has on presidential priorities in the unilateral action strategy, things get much more complex. In most cases, political support frees the president to prioritize those policy areas he can't regularly attend to, but in other cases, it causes him to prioritize those policy areas that are his to deal with because of the Constitution. This suggests that presidents rely on different types of political support in order to prioritize different issues.

Across the three strategies, the effect of increased support in the House and Senate in largely consistent. This suggests that the effect an increase in support has on the relationship between the president and the institution is a characteristic of the relationship between the institutions, rather than a

function of time. The relationship between the president and the public is not nearly so stable. In each of the three strategies, the trade-offs that are significantly affected by an increase in public support change in the short- and long-run. This suggests that the effect the public has on the president is constantly shifting and he has to juggle what the public will support him in and allow him to deal with later.

Even with all these lessons, I am left with a few questions for future study. First, considering all the different, and sometimes contradictory, effects the political and policy environment has on policy trade-offs in the proposal strategy, I would be interested in examining these actions more closely. Does the fact that the proposal strategy covers multiple tools, all of which might behave and be used slightly differently, drive the complicated analysis in Table 6.3? Or are the policy-strategy decisions surrounding proposing policy naturally complex and subject to multiple influences? Only a deeper dive would give us answers to this question, which makes it a fruitful direction for future research.

Another question that comes out of this study, comes from the observation that when we compare this chapter with the fourth chapter, where we study only policy prioritization, it is very clear that the proposal strategy dominates the general analysis, in terms of both number of observations and proportion of the president's policy activity. As such, the results from the analysis of the proposal strategy are not much different than the analysis of the first empirical chapter, though this chapter does include measures of the

political environment. One of the flaws in this analysis comes from the fact that many of the proposal strategy tools are coded at the quasi-sentence level, while the shaping and unilateral action tools are coded at the document level. If we converted the document level observations to the quasi-sentence level, would we see the same relationships between the strategies and the same results from the graphical analysis or the compositional analysis? Perhaps we would see different results, in which the proposal strategy is less dominant, but perhaps we would still see similar effects.

In this chapter, we focused in the policy-strategy decisions that presidents make, exploring the complexity of the joint decision that presidents must make about what policy areas to prioritize and the strategy to pursue. This chapter represents the goal that we have been progressing towards through this whole project: a complex understanding of presidential decision-making. In the first chapter, I highlighted why it is important to study presidential decision making, in the second, I outlined a theory for how presidents use their abilities to process information to make decisions. In the third chapter, I outlined the seven new datasets, and join them with three existing datasets to study presidential decision-making quantitatively, before introducing the primarily methodological tool, Dynamic Pie compositional analysis, that I used to study these data.

The fourth chapter offered a chance to study the simple phenomenon of what policy areas presidents prioritize and the forces in the policy environment that shape those trade-offs. The fifth chapter takes the same simple, one

dimensional approach and studies the president's choice of strategy and the way the political environment can lead to the prioritization of some strategies over others. This chapter brought all of those chapters together, building a unified approach to of policy prioritization and strategy selection. In the next chapter, we will explore what we have learned and think about what it means for our understanding of presidential decision-making.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The first six months of the Trump presidency saw a great deal of policy action. In that time, the president gave a State of the Union address that had 297 policy quasi-sentences; a budget message, with 41 policy quasi-sentences; 43 executive orders; 13 press conferences; 65 memoranda; 53 proclamations; and 10 signing statements. These actions represented all three presidential policy strategies, and included high profile decisions, like the president's executive orders banning the entry of individuals from several Muslim-majority countries; a memorandum overturning President Obama's memorandum that had blocked the Mexico City policy, putting back in place a ban on foreign aid for non-government organizations who provide information about abortion; and a series of memoranda advancing the construction of oil pipelines, the building of which had been the center of mass protests during the Obama administration, due to concerns about environmental degradation and the violation of Native burial sites. It did not take President Trump very long to reshape the direction of policy making in the United States.

All of these decisions were rooted in the way that President Trump understood the world. His beliefs about what was necessary to make Amer-

ica safe and prosperous, guided by information that fit with these beliefs, shaped his decision making, just as it does for every president. Presidential decision-making is shaped by the way presidents, burdened by their cognitive and emotional limitations, beliefs, and the responsibility of one of the most complex jobs in the world, process information, prioritize policy areas, and select strategies to achieve their goals.

This dissertation set out a fresh approach to understand presidential decision-making by connecting the presidency to information processing theories. This approach to behavioral choice highlights how the structure of the presidency creates a decision-making process that relies on the cognitive and emotional capacities of the individuals in the office, while the institutional structure and the political and policy environment put pressures on their choices. Once presidents have decided to get involved in policy making, they have to process information about the responsibilities of the office, the policy and political environment, as well as their own political strength, to make decisions about what policy areas to prioritize and what strategies they should use to pursue those policy goals.

To examine those decisions and understand the forces that shape them, I analyzed ten datasets of presidential actions, seven of which were original to this project: presidential press conferences, budget messages, State of the Union addresses, major televised addresses, addresses to a joint session of Congress, proclamations, memoranda, signing statements, executive orders, and veto threats. All of these dataset gave us insight into the wide range of

ways that presidents try to affect policy. By examining these datasets of presidential policy action from Ronald Reagan (1981) to Barack Obama (2014), we gain a much clearer insight into the decisions that presidents make about the policy process, their strategies, and the factors that affect their abilities to make trade-offs between their policy priorities and strategies. This dissertation makes a contribution to the presidency and policy process literatures by moving away from purely theoretical and case-based studies of presidential policy decision-making to a empirically-grounded study of the presidency, one which relies on the combination of theory and data to better understand the decisions that presidents make and the factors that shape those decisions.

7.1 The Conclusions

This dissertation explored the decisions that presidents make about what policy areas to prioritize and the strategies to use. These questions let us understand how presidents translate information into action. These decisions are important because they fundamentally affect presidential involvement in the policy process; the president can't be involved unless he is paying attention and taking some sort of action. As we conclude this dissertation, let's take a moment to appreciate what we have learned from this study before turning our attention to the contributions of this study to the presidency and policy process literatures.

In chapter 3, which introduced us to the individual policy tools, we began to learn what policies presidents prioritize and how they use the different

tools. We see a great deal of variety in the frequency, in the timing, and in the distribution of attention in the tools, which is not surprising as there are 10 different tools. We saw that some tools, like executive orders, deal with many policy areas, while other tools deal with only a few, like addresses to a joint session of Congress. We also see some tools occur with the regularity of clockwork, like the State of the Union address, while many others occur at the president's discretion, such as press conferences and veto threats. These observations only begin to scratch the surface of presidential decision-making, but give us a flavor of the complexity of what is to come in the dissertation.

In chapter 4, which is the first empirically-focused chapter of this dissertation, I focused on what policies presidents prioritize. I hypothesized that presidents would be affected by their constitutional obligations, economic responsibility, and party issue ownership. What I found was that presidents are motivated by the constitutional demands of the job, but that economic responsibility and issue ownership are more nuanced than I had initially expected. Instead of all presidents taking action on the economy in similar ways because they are expected to be stewards of the economy in good times and bad, I found that presidents pay much more attention to the economy when there are problems and will prioritize other issues much more when economic conditions are good. When it came to party, I had initially assumed that presidents would pay attention to issues in line with their "brand." Instead of that straight forward relationship, I found that Democratic and Republican presidents prioritize different issues, but that those issues do not match cleanly

with those issues they are supposed to favor based on existing theories. The decision about what to prioritize seems to be sensitive to duty to the job and the way the president perceives the policy problem, characteristics that will appear again when we unite policy prioritization with strategy selection in the last empirical chapter.

In the next chapter, chapter 5, I focused on the selection of strategies that presidents use to engage in policy. I first set out the three general strategies that presidents have for policy making: proposing, shaping, and unilateral action. I hypothesized that presidents will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the individual tools and measure their own political strength in the policy making environment to decide which tools to rely on. Specifically, I hypothesized that public support would empower presidents to take unilateral action, congressional support would empower presidents to propose policy, and that timing, both within the legislative year and across a presidential term, would have a significant effect on the choice of strategy. I found support for some of these ideas, particularly the importance of timing: as the legislative year comes to a close and as presidential elections near, presidents favor shaping and unilateral action. I also found that public approval and congressional support in the House have no affect on presidential decision making and that support in the Senate is only effective in the long term, but that it encourages presidents to shy away from using the shaping strategy. The decision about what strategy to use is important, as it reflects the president's ability to read the political environment and translate that information into choices about

action.

Finally, in chapter six, we saw the culmination of the two earlier chapters, the examination of what we have learned about policy prioritization and strategy selection. I hypothesized that presidents would use information about the policy environment and the political environment to make decisions about which policy areas to prioritize in each of the three strategies. The most fundamental expectation was that policy prioritization would differ across the strategies. This was born out in the analysis; presidents use the different strategies to prioritize different policy areas, though they still strongly prioritize the constitutional policy areas that were at the center of chapter 4. Additionally, the trade-offs that presidents make differ across the strategies. Presidents are much more sensitive to the political and policy environment in the proposal strategy than they are in the shaping strategy, where a president's priorities are less likely to require regular trade-offs. The unilateral action strategy clearly shows that the sensitivity that presidents have to their political environments does not require the same kind of policy environment sensitivity that the proposal strategy required. These findings reinforce the need for empirical study of presidential action in both the policy area and the strategy, as the differences help us to understand what forces shape presidential decision making.

7.2 The Contributions

This dissertation offers three contributions to the study of the presidency and policy process. First, it offers a fresh approach to presidential decision making, by offering a way to think about the general behavioral choice of presidents. Past studies of the presidency have long focused on the particularities of each president, arguing that the psychologies of the individual men are sufficiently distinct as to make it difficult to generalize about the office. The idea is that the "small N" — or small number of presidents— results in an inability to generalize. I look at studying the presidency differently. Just a the field of psychology has move from focusing on individual cases to studying general phenomenon, I believe that we should move from studying how individual presidents make decisions to studying how the presidency—the institution—makes decisions. I do this by focusing on the general forces that shape presidential decision making: information supply, organizational information pre-processing, and the president's serial processing limitations. By moving from a discussion of individual differences, as much of the presidency literature had focused in the past, to a study of general characteristics, we are able to move the study of the presidency forward.

To understand the general process of presidential decision making, I moved from studying the individual president to studying the presidential decision. In this framework, decisions are the product of information, policy prioritization, and strategy selection. Information in the disproportionate information processing world is abundant. Presidents have to sort through it in

order to decide what is important and what is not and they struggle to assimilate new information with what they already know and believe in a timely fashion. Once they have information, they must use it to decide what policies to pay attention to and what strategies to use. In this dissertation, I studied the prioritization of policy areas and the selection of strategies independently in chapters 4 and 5, before studying the joint policy-strategy decision in chapter 6. This process of studying the components of the decision before the decision as a whole allowed for the gradual development of understanding before diving into the complexity of real-life decision making.

The second contribution of this study is in the way it challenges the supposed "small-N" problem of presidency studies. Scholars have said that the small number of presidents makes empirical research difficult, compared with an institution like Congress and its 535 members. One way to tackle this problem, however, is to study the presidential decision instead of studying the individual president. This means that instead of 5 presidents in this study, there are 27,022 decisions. This move towards studying decisions allows for extensive empirical analysis and a new appreciation for what it is that presidents actually do. Empirical analysis of any institution is difficult. The task of collecting data and coding it is labor intensive and long, and requires considerable attention to detail. The Policy Agendas Project offers scholars a structure and a coding scheme to attack the problem of comparability across time, action, and institution, and should be looked to for an example of how to create and code policy data. Importantly, particularly for the president,

the PAP encourages hand coding of data, in order to account for the complexity of language, how it changes over time, and has nuance and flow that are impossible for current computer coding models to pick up.[1] This hand coding of data makes adding to presidency data difficult, but more accurate.

It sounds simplistic to say, but despite incredible public and scholarly interest in the president, studies of the presidency have not tried to comprehensively examine what it is that presidents do in office. The actions of the president, whether it is the type and frequency of tools used or the policy areas that they pay attention to have not, prior to this dissertation, been directly studied. Prior scholars have been able to accurately theorize the general presidential agenda from simple observation, as the president is often at the center of media attention, but actual measurement of the presidential agenda, whether that be through the total agenda, the strategy agendas, or the policy tool agendas, has not been done before. This fact alone makes this dissertation a contribution to the study of the presidency. Scholars of the presidency must not be intimidated by the amount of data necessary to analyze in order to study the president. Instead, they need to pick a point and start. Every new policy tool dataset and year of data enrich our understanding of the office and

[1] Current work in Natural Language Processing can use dictionaries to code explicit policy mentions at roughly 80% accuracy, but cannot code implicit policy mentions that are rife in rhetoric. Think of the example "Education is the most important tool for advancing creativity in the sciences. It will open doors for the future!" Computer coding would do just fine with the first sentence, but be unable to recognize that the second sentence is still implicitly about the power of education. Speeches, such as the State of the Union address, addresses to a joint session of Congress, and press conference opening statements are full of passages similar to these.

the way that these individuals have made decisions in the highest office in the land.

Finally, this dissertation offers a way of studying the trade-offs that an individual makes when faced with limited time and attention. Prior work applying compositional analysis to political science has largely looked at how groups of individuals act in response to changes in the environment (Katz and King 1999; Tomz, Tucker and Wittenberg 2002; Lipsmeyer 2011; Philips, Rutherford and Whitten 2016*a*). These analyses aggregate the decision making capacity of many individuals in order to understand how a system works and, implicitly, processes information. In this dissertation, compositional analysis is used to take a look at the decision making of a very small group of individuals: United States presidents. This select group of people have faced down some of the most difficult decisions of modern time: do I meet with the Soviets or do I address the AIDS epidemic that is killing thousands? Do I focus all my attention on the terror attack that has just been perpetrated again my country or do divert some of my attention to the many other problems that face the American people? For presidents, the decision about what to concentrate on now versus later can have life-or-death consequences.

Consequently, it is vital that we understand what shapes those trade-offs. What we found in this study is that presidents are sensitive to information about policy problems, but that they are also sensitive to political concerns. Their decisions about what policies to prioritize and what strategies to pursue are complex, but they are responsive to information. This should give us

hope. The United States relies on having a president who can make good decisions to protect the country and advance our interests. Perhaps the worst nightmare for Americans is having a president who is so overwhelmed with their own cognitive and emotional limitations that they can not make coherent decisions. What the analysis in this dissertation show is that, while presidents do process information disproportionately, requiring them to make massive shifts in attention, they are able to make routine trade-offs in response to new information.

7.3 New Directions

This dissertation offers a fresh approach to presidential decision-making. Building on theories of decision making and information processing that centered on Congress, the work of Jones and Baumgartner (2005) offered the policy process community a way of thinking about behavioral choice that was rooted in the bounded rationality of Simon (1957, 1983). Decision making is neither simple nor based purely on preferences. Instead, it is based on information and an actor's ability to makes sense of and integrate it in a world where there is far too much information to make sense of it all. While scholars of the presidency have long tried to understand how presidents make decisions, the work was largely based on the assumption that presidents struggled to get the information they needed. This dissertation moves away from this perspective towards the information processing perspective.

But there is still much more work that needs to be done. We need to

think more deeply about and study information pre-processing. While this dissertation acknowledges the importance of White House organization and the management style of presidents for their ability to process information, it only begins to scratch the surface of how information search happens in the presidency. *The Politics of Information* by Baumgartner and Jones (2015) highlights two different ways individuals search for information: expert search and entropic search. Expert search is focused and based on a single, well-defined problem. Entropic search is more diffuse and complex, searching to find a problem to tackle and a solution.[2] Each has a different situation in which it works best, as expert search works well when there is hierarchy and jurisdictional boundaries and entropic search works well in decentralized environments with overlapping jurisdictions (Baumgartner and Jones 2015). While institutions like Congress and the bureaucracy contain structural elements that lend themselves to both expert and entropic search under particular conditions, the organization of the presidency and its information pre-processors can shift so much from one president to another that it is difficult to know whether the information processing of the president is dominated by expert or entropic search. Perhaps the way an issue comes on to the agenda could affect the type of search associate with it; issues that the president pro-actively puts on the agenda could be subject to entropic search, but those issues that come on to the presidential agenda in response to exigent circumstances might be char-

[2]Think of expert search like an big game hunter: he knows exactly what he wants to find, his trophy, and merely has to hunt for it. Think of entropic search as a fisherman: casting a wide net and then has to make use of what is in the net.

acterized more by expert search. As little is know about information search in the presidency, it is a fruitful potential avenue for future research, as the decision making ability of the president is deeply rooted in how they wade through information.

Additionally, this dissertation is merely the start of empirical studies of the presidency. A data-driven approach to the presidency, much like has been done to study Congress, must be our goal so as to be able to test positive theories of presidential behavior and the effect the presidency has on other political actors. The Neustadt axiom that that guided so much of presidency studies is that "the power of the president is the power to persuade (Neustadt 1991). Yet research that has attempted to understand the president's persuasiveness has cast doubts on the truth of the statement. Perhaps it is because past scholars have been looking in the wrong place for persuasion, by focusing on the presidents' speeches. Perhaps it is his actions that persuade other political actors to pay attention to an issue or follow the president's position. By studying a wider array of presidential actions and speeches and focusing on measuring the relationships between presidents and other actors, we could gain a whole new insight into the role the president plays in the larger policy making process that this dissertation only begins to touch on.

In order to do that however, there needs to be a commitment to presidential data. By focusing for so long on the differences between presidents, scholars said "empirical work can't be done—the number of presidents is just too small." That perspective completely ignores the hundreds upon thousands

of individual decisions each president makes. By moving from thinking about the president as the unit of analysis to the decision, I increase the amount there is to study, erasing the complaints that have prevented people from studying the president empirically. And even with the seven new datasets in this dissertation and the application of three more, there are still yet many other types of presidential action that haven't been studied, such as speeches to the UN General Assembly, national security decision directives, other public speeches and events, and many others. Presidential tweets are currently a topic of fascination, as President Trump's fondness for the medium offers the public, political actors, and scholars an unusually honest insight into presidential thinking. With a new dedication to data, there are enough avenues of data work to keep scholars busy for years.

Finally, it is worth thinking about different ways to study the data that is already available. For example, in this dissertation, I barely began to study the individual tools. For this project, I stayed primarily at the strategy level in order to simplify the analysis in chapter 6 as I looked at both policy area and strategy. But we need to look more deeply into how presidents have used their individual policy tools. A panel data approach that looks at the different policy areas in the different tools at a single point in time might give us different insights than we gained from this dissertation, as the constant environment removes the need to look at all the different environmental forces. Or we could use a time series cross-sectional approach to look at what predicts the use of the different tools overtime, which is a variation on the compositional analysis

in chapter 4. In Chapter 3, I offered a first look into what policy areas the presidents focus on in each of these tools, but there is so much more we could learn from looking more intently at these data. The role of the president in the policy process has been so understudied from an empirical angle that there are incredible possibilities for the dedicated researcher.

Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix to Chapter Four

Figure A.1: Defense Spending, Billions of Dollars

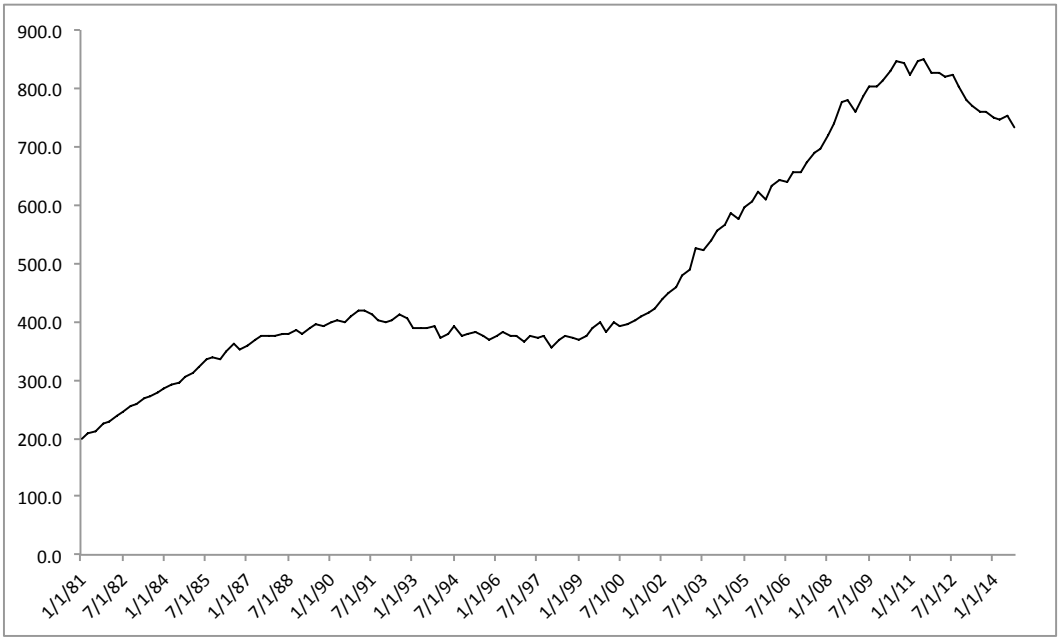


Figure A.2: Percent GDP Change

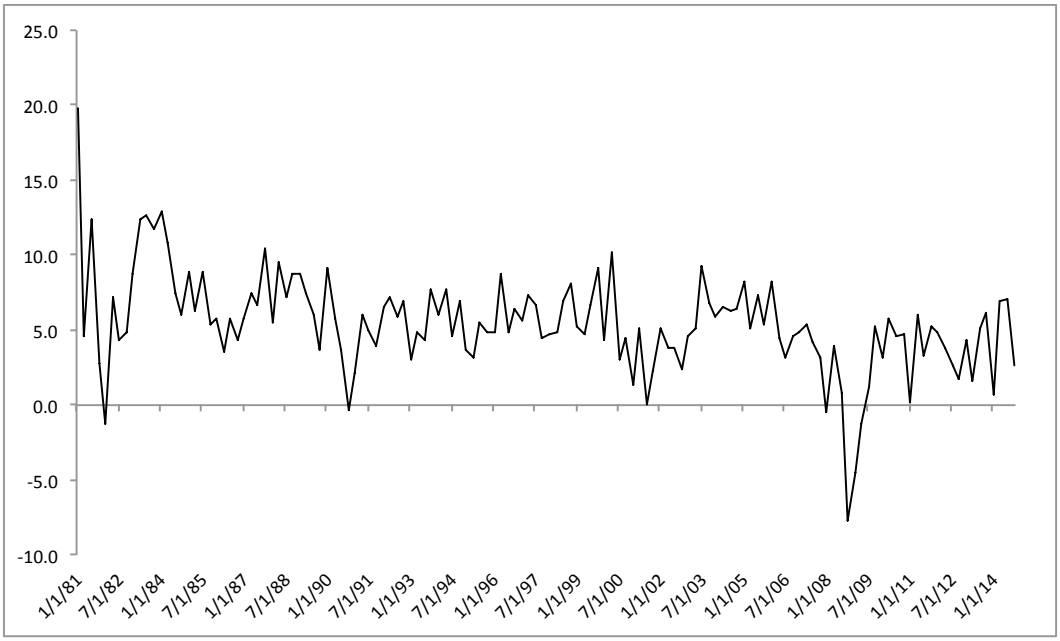


Figure A.3: Unemployment Level, Thousands Unemployed

Table A.1: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Lagged Dependent Variable	-1.151*	-1.015*	-1.040*	-1.048*	-1.178*	-1.100*	-1.050*	-1.068*
Percent GDP Change-Short	0.004	0.019	0.020	0.035	-0.046∧	-0.069∧	-0.034	-0.054*
Percent GDP Change-Long	-0.037	0.033	-0.005	-0.013	-0.103*	-0.061	-0.074*	-0.068*
Defense Spending-Short	-0.002	0.006	0.003	0.018*	-0.001	-0.014∧	0.003	0.000
Defense Spending-Long	0.001*	0.001	0.001*	0.000	-0.001	-0.001	-0.000	-0.002*
Unemployment Level-Short	-.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.000∧	-0.000∧
Unemployment Level-Long	-.000	-0.000∧	-0.000*	-0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000	0.000*
Democratic President	-0.072	-0.283∧	-0.374*	-0.255	-0.217	-0.260	-0.515*	-0.140
Constant	0.391	0.667	1.088*	1.735*	-0.100	-1.078*	0.737*	-0.380
R-Squared	0.585	0.507	0.552	0.570	0.636	0.658	0.549	0.582

*: significant at 0.05 level, ∧ signifiant at 0.1 level

Appendix B

Appendix for Chapter Five

Table B.1: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effect on Presidential Strategy Selection

Independent Variables	$\frac{Unilateral}{Late-Stage}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Late-Stage}$	$\frac{Proposal}{Unilateral}$
Lagged Dependent Variable	-0.744*	-1.079*	-1.099*
Net Seats in House-Short-Term	0.005	0.005	0.000
Net Seats in House-Long-Term	0.001	0.004	0.003
Net Seats in Senate-Short-Term	0.007	-0.005	-0.018
Net Seats in Senate-Long-Term	0.030*	0.041*	0.001
Quarter-Short-Term	-0.289*	-1.590*	-1.271*
Quarter-Long-Term	-0.217*	-0.835	-0.492*
Years Since Election-Short-Term	-0.018	-0.234	-0.139
Years Since Election-Long-Term	0.062	-0.298*	-0.342*
Percent Approval -Short-Term	0.009	0.012	-0.004
Percent Approval -Long-Term	-0.006	0.013	0.007
Democratic President	-0.491*	-0.772*	-0.054
Constant	1.773*	4.144*	-1.438
R-squared	0.59	0.90	0.91

*: significant at 0.05 level

Figure B.1: Presidential Approval, Percentage

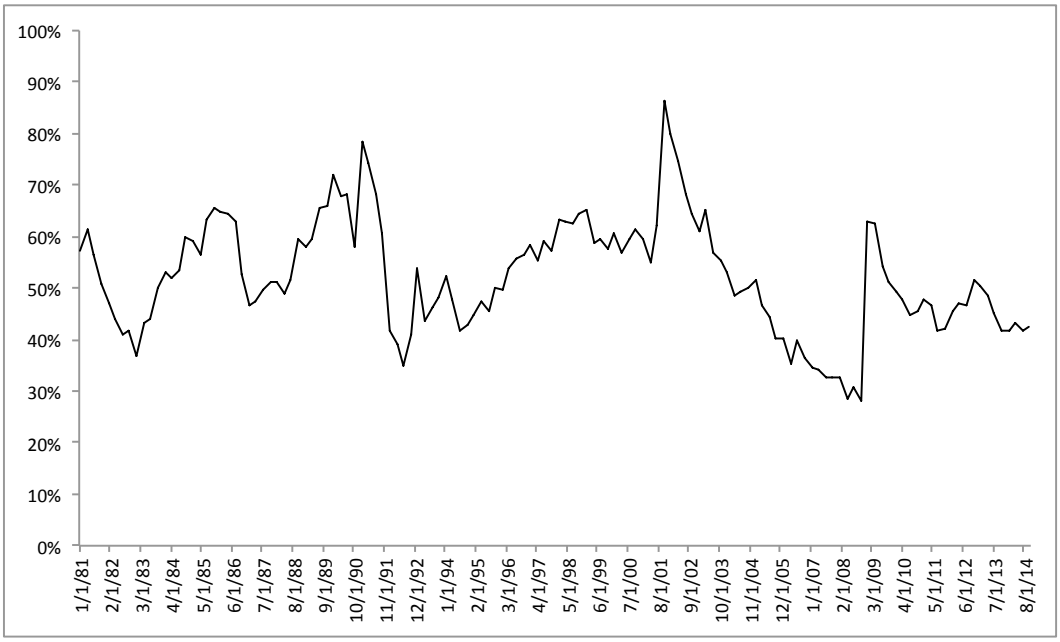


Figure B.2: Net Number of Seats for President's Party in the House of Representatives

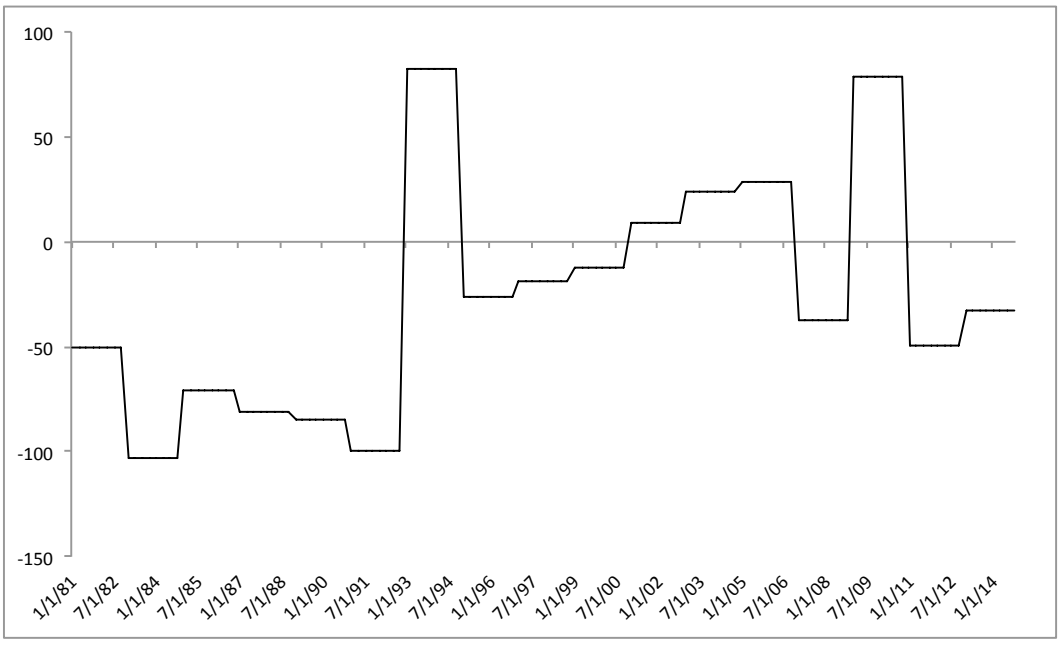
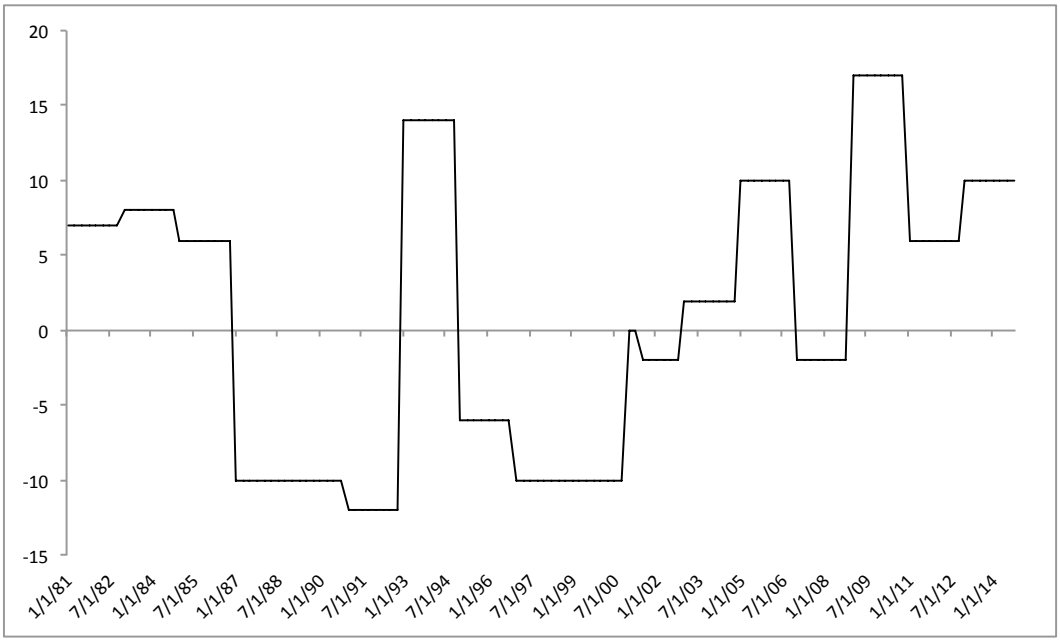


Figure B.3: Net Number of Seats for President's Party in the Senate



Appendix C

Appendix for Chapter Six

C.1 Policy-Strategy Compositional Analysis Tables with Coefficients

Table C.1: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Proposal Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Lagged Dependent	-0.970*	-1.196*	-0.990*	-1.163*	-1.050*	-0.943*	-1.300*	-1.104*	-0.967*	-0.956*
Seats in House-Short	-0.003	-0.001	-0.005	-0.012*	-0.016*	-0.013*	0.010*	0.011*	-0.004	0.011*
Seats in House-Long	0.007*	0.001	0.006	-0.014*	-0.005	-0.004	0.014*	0.003	-0.002	0.002
Seats in Senate-Short	0.062*	0.063∧	0.118*	0.019	0.134*	0.066∧	0.000	-0.064*	0.009	-0.112*
Seats in Senate-Long	-0.023	0.036	0.013	0.048∧	0.057	0.012	-0.059*	-0.037∧	-0.017	-0.066*
Years since Last Election-Short	0.015	0.081	0.100	-0.027	0.062	-0.055	-0.133	-0.186*	-0.222*	-0.256*
Years since Last Election-Long	0.126	0.201	0.344∧	-0.076	0.227	-0.047	-0.167	-0.277*	-0.261	-0.441*
Approval-Short	-0.011	-0.007	-0.021	0.009	-0.011	-0.001	-0.042*	-0.030*	-0.031*	-0.018
Approval-Long	-0.005	0.025∧	0.020	0.029*	0.048*	0.020	-0.056*	-0.048*	-0.020	-0.065*
% GDP Change-Short	-0.028	0.002	0.027	-0.164∧	-0.115	-0.153	-0.079	-0.139∧	-0.302*	-0.208∧
% GDP Change-Long	-0.020	-0.009	-0.023	-0.243*	-0.188	-0.200	-0.045	-0.102	-0.315*	-0.160
Unemployment-Short	-0.000∧	0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	-0.000*	0.000	0.000	-0.000∧	-0.000
Unemployment-Long	-0.000*	-0.000	-.000*	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000*	0.000∧	0.000*	0.000	0.000*
Defense Spending-Short	0.003	-0.002	0.001	0.012*	0.012	0.013*	0.002	0.002∧	0.016*	0.005
Defense Spending-Long	0.000	0.003*	0.003*	0.001	0.004*	0.001	-0.002*	-0.003*	-0.001	-0.005*
Democratic President	0.609*	-0.195	0.612	-0.763*	-0.160*	-0.125	-0.143	-0.712*	-0.702∧	-0.598
Constant	1.049	-0.636	0.066	1.318	1.268*	2.149	4.012	2.824*	4.713*	3.663*
R-Squared	0.777	0.693	0.711	0.860	0.651	0.673	0.872	0.835	0.739	0.696

*: significant at 0.05 level, ∧ significant at 0.1 level

Table C.2: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Shaping Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Lagged Dependent	-1.357*	-1.207*	-1.124*	-1.063*	-1.177*	-0.888*	-1.300*	-1.388*	-0.974	-1.105*
Seats in House-Short	0.001	0.008∧	0.008	-0.004	0.003	-0.001	0.001*	0.010*	0.005	0.000
Seats in House-Long	-0.000	-0.003	-0.003	0.004	0.000	0.005	0.008*	0.009*	0.011*	.010*
Seats in Senate-Short	0.012	-0.059*	-0.045	0.013	-0.024	0.006	-0.028	-0.044∧	-0.011	0.022
Seats in Senate-Long	0.031	-0.019	0.013	-0.027	-0.010	-0.009	0.014	-0.019	-0.014	0.002
Approval-Short	-0.001	0.022∧	0.018	0.004	0.019∧	-0.001	0.016∧	0.017∧	0.018*	-0.004
Approval-Long	0.024	0.0136	0.032∧	0.002	0.034*	0.017	0.013	-0.010	0.011	-0.22∧
Years since Last Election-Short	-0.093	0.008	-0.043	0.178	0.141*	0.132	-0.128∧	-0.037	0.061	-0.077
Years since Last Election-Long	-0.125	-0.160	-0.241	0.401*	0.194∧	0.276∧	-0.245*	-0.131	0.181∧	0.025
% GDP Change-Short	0.175	0.074	0.277∧	-0.267∧	-0.004	-0.033	0.203*	0.035	-0.071	-0.087
% GDP Change-Long	-0.119	0.125	0.260	-0.082	0.160	0.098	0.103	-0.002	-0.010	-0.185
Unemployment-Short	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000
Unemployment-Long	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000∧	0.000	0.000	-0.000
Defense Spending-Short	-0.009	0.009	-0.003	0.017*	0.015*	0.002	-0.015*	-0.006	0.000	-0.013*
Defense Spending-Long	-0.001	0.003*	0.002∧	-0.000	0.002*	-0.001	-0.000	0.001	-0.001	-0.003*
Democratic President	-0.624	0.102	-0.457	0.479	0.073	-0.180	-0.961*	-0.343	-0.503∧	-0.498
Constant	-1.628	-4.332	-5.619	0.373	-4.963*	-1.530	-2.404	-1.099	-1.135	3.853
R-Squared	0.788	0.713	0.753	0.791	0.754	0.583	0.889	0.757	0.732	0.795

*: significant at 0.05 level, ∧ significant at 0.1 level

Table C.3: Estimated Short- and Long-Term Effects on Presidential Policy Attention at the Unilateral Action Stage

Independent Variables	$\frac{Social}{Econ}$	$\frac{Econ}{Gov}$	$\frac{Social}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Social}$	$\frac{Intl}{Gov}$	$\frac{Intl}{Econ}$	$\frac{Social}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Econ}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Intl}{Domestic}$	$\frac{Gov}{Domestic}$
Lagged Dependent	-0.989*	-1.082*	-0.728*	-0.971*	-1.226*	-1.013*	-0.672*	-1.056*	-0.826*	-0.853*
Seats in House-Short	-0.004∧	0.004	-0.001	-0.001	-0.001	-0.005∧	0.001	0.006*	0.000	0.002
Seats in House-Long	-0.002	-0.002	-0.004*	0.001	-0.003*	-0.001	-0.001	0.001	-0.000	0.003*
Seats in Senate-Short	0.031*	-0.026	0.015	0.012	0.017	0.044*	-0.005	-0.046*	0.000	-0.021∧
Seats in Senate-Long	0.026∧	-0.000	0.028*	-0.002	0.025*	0.024	0.006	-0.025∧	-0.001	-0.024*
Approval-Short	0.000	0.010	0.008	-0.014*	-0.005	-0.014*	0.001	0.001	-0.011*	-0.008∧
Approval-Long	0.016*	-0.001	0.015*	-0.003	0.010*	0.013	0.003	-0.017*	-0.001	-0.014*
Years since Last Election-Short	0.066	0.135	0.129*	0.064∧	0.149*	0.134*	-0.065*	-0.150*	-0.022	-0.186*
Years since Last Election-Long	0.106	-0.062	0.073	0.105∧	0.189*	0.220*	-0.100*	-0.248*	-0.024	-0.183*
% GDP Change-Short	-0.080	0.161*	0.082∧	-0.048	0.023	-0.130*	0.032	0.094∧	-0.028	-0.058
% GDP Change-Long	-0.111∧	0.187*	0.092	-0.009	0.049	-0.123	-0.003	0.086	-0.034	-0.099*
Unemployment-Short	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000
Unemployment-Long	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000*	-0.000	0.000	0.000*	0.000	0.000*
Defense Spending-Short	0.002	-0.003	-0.000	0.001	-0.001	0.003	-0.002	-0.004	-0.000	-0.002
Defense Spending-Long	-0.002*	0.003*	0.001	-0.000	0.000	-0.002*	-0.000	0.001*	-0.001	-0.001*
Democratic President	0.208	-0.163	0.190	0.256∧	0.282*	0.471*	-0.371*	-0.791*	-0.210	-0.610*
Constant	2.025*	-2.805*	-1.026	0.303	0.079	2.411*	-0.220	-2.207*	0.112	0.733
R-Squared	0.746	0.626	0.724	0.661	0.837	0.695	0.777	0.696	0.605	0.803

*: significant at 0.05 level, ∧ significant at 0.1 level

C.2 Analysis of Individual Results in Compositional Analysis

C.2.1 Compositional Analysis in the Proposal Strategy

Table 6.1 (for a complete table with all coefficients, see Table C.1) shows the statistically significant effects policy and political information has on trade-offs between policy areas in the proposal strategy. In this strategy, every continuous or categorical independent variable is reported with both short- and long-term effect, due to the Error Correction Model framework of the analysis. This means that only one variable, the dummy variable for the president's party, is reported once in the tables. In this chapter, short-term effects look at the impact that change in the independent variable has on pairs of policy areas from one year to the next. The long-term effects look at the impact that a change in the independent variable has on the trend over time in the pairs of variables, as error correction models seek out a stable equilibrium over time.

The number of seats for the president's party in the House of Representatives has a statistically significant effect at the 0.05 level on six pairs of policies in the short-term. In the relationship between international relations and social welfare, government operations, the economy, when the number of seats for the president's party increases, social welfare, government operations, or the economy each get prioritized and the extra attention comes from international affairs. The number of seats the president's party has in the house also has an effect on the relationship between other domestic policy and social welfare, the economy, and government operations, where each of those other issues gets prioritized over other domestic policy. These results suggest that immediately after the president's party gains seats, the president is less likely to deal with issues of international affairs or other domestic policy. In the long term, there is less of an effect. The relationship between social welfare and the economy, international affairs, and other domestic policy is such that an increase in presidential support in the House leads presidents to prioritize social welfare policy over the other three policy areas.

The number of seats for the president's party in the Senate has a statistically significant effect on five pairs of policies in the short term. First,

an increase in the Senate leads presidents to prioritize social welfare over economics and government operations. Second, it causes the president to prioritize international affairs over government operations. Third, it causes the president to prioritize other domestic policy over the economy and government operations. These results reveal the way senatorial support in the short term can cause presidents to pay less attention to government operations and the economy, just as much as it causes presidents to pay more attention to social welfare and other domestic policy. In the long term, the effect of the Senate is much weaker: it causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare and government operations.

The public approval rating of the president has a smaller effect in the short run than in the long run. In the short run, only three pairs of policy areas are statistically significant: an increase in the president's public approval rating leads presidents to propose more other domestic policy and less social welfare, economic, international affairs. In the long run, five pairs of policy areas are significant: presidents still prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare and economics, but they also prioritize other domestic policy over government operations and international affairs over social welfare and government operations.

The number of years since the last presidential election has a specific effect on presidential prioritization. In the short term, it causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over the economy, international affairs, and government operations, and in the long term, it causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over the economy and government operations. It's really quite interesting that the effect of time since the last election is so persistent; it means that, when it comes to proposing policy, time increases presidential freedom. Presidents are free to propose a wider range of policies, than just their core functions.

The percent change in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) causes presidents to de-prioritize international affairs. In the short term, as the percent change in GDP increases, presidents choose to prioritize other domestic policy over international affairs. In the long term, an increase in the amount the GDP changes causes presidents to prioritize social welfare policy and other domestic policy over international affairs.

The level of unemployment has a modest effect on presidential decision making in the short-term, but a widespread effect in the long-term. In the short term, an increase in the number of people who are unemployed causes presidents to prioritize social welfare policy and economic policy at the expense of international affairs. In the long term, presidents prioritize economic policy and government operations. They prioritize these two issues over the three other issues in this study. Both government operations and economics get more attention, attention which comes from social welfare policy, international affairs, and other domestic policy. This suggests that when the economy is tanking, presidents turn their attention to the home front and the policy areas they might need to consider in order to solve the problem and are willing to sacrifice attention to everything else.

An increase in the level of defense spending causes presidents to prioritize, in the short term, international affairs. From one year to the next, an increase in the amount being spent on defense causes presidents to de-prioritize social welfare, the economy, and other domestic policy in favor of more attention for international affairs. The long-term effect of an increase in spending on defense is more diffuse. In the long-term, presidents propose less policy about government operations, and prioritizing the economy, social welfare, international affairs, and other domestic policy. Additionally, they prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare and the economy. While there is a case to be made that it makes sense for presidents to de-prioritization of government operations in response to defense spending,[1] it is much less obvious why defense spending should increase the way presidents take action on other domestic policy. This is one of the more mysterious findings in this dissertation.

Finally, the party of the president causes Democratic presidents to pay more attention to social welfare, government operations, and other domestic policy, and less attention to economic policy and international affairs. This would suggest that, in the proposal stage, we see much more evidence for issue ownership theory than we did in the aggregate analysis in chapter 4. Here Democrats are giving more of their attention to the issues that the theory

[1] See Chapter 4

would predict, namely social welfare and other domestic policy and Republicans are giving more attention to economic policy an international affairs.[2]

C.2.2 Compositional Analysis in the Shaping Strategy

Table 6.2 (for a complete table with all coefficients, see Table C.2) shows the statistically significant effects (at the 0.05 level) that policy and political information has on trade-offs between policy areas in the shaping strategy. In this strategy, the number of seats for the president's party in the House of Representatives, in the short term, causes the president to prioritize either social welfare policy or economic policy over other domestic policy. In the long run, this relationship is even stronger, with the president prioritizing every other issue over other domestic policy. Consequently, we can say that the effect of increased support in the House is that the president would rather use the shaping strategy for social welfare, economics, international affairs, or government operations, than use it for other domestic policy.

The number of seats for the president's party in the Senate has a very minor effect. In the short run, the only relationship that is affected is the relationship between the economy and government operations. In this case, an increase in the number of seats the president's party has in the Senate causes presidents to prioritize government operations, decreasing the amount the strategy is used for economic policy. In the long run, the number of seats for the president's party has no statistically significant effect.

In the shaping strategy, the public approval rating of the president affects international affairs, causing the issue to be prioritized over other issues. In the short run, an increase in presidential approval causes international affairs to be prioritized over other domestic policy and, in the long run, international affairs is prioritized over government operations. This shows that public support gives presidents more freedom to shape congressional action on international affairs.

The number of years since the last presidential election affects the way

[2]Issue ownership theory is agnostic about the effect that party would have on attention to government operations.

presidents shape policy, causing them to prioritize international affairs and de-prioritize social welfare policy. In the short term, each passing year of the presidency courages presidents to pay more attention to international affairs and less to government operations. In the long term, as presidents get close to reelection or the end of their time in office, they prioritize international affairs and other domestic policy, but always at the expense of social welfare policy.

The percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) change has a minor effect on shaping strategy. It is statistically significant only in the short term, where an increase in the percent GDP change causes presidents to prioritize social welfare policy over other domestic policy. GDP change has no statistically significant effects in the long run.

The level of unemployment has no effect on the choice of policy areas in the shaping strategy.

The level of defense spending affects the way presidents prioritize international affairs, other domestic policy, and de-prioritize government operations. In the short term, an increase in defense spending causes presidents to pay more attention to international affairs, favoring it over social welfare and government operations, and other domestic policy, favoring it over social welfare and other government operations. In the long term, presidents prioritize the economy, international affairs, and other domestic policy over government operations.

The party of the president doesn't have as robust an effect as it had in the proposal strategy. In the shaping strategy, the president being a Democrat only affects one pair of policies. A Democrat is more likely to prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare.

C.2.3 Compositional Analysis in the Unilateral Action Strategy

Table 6.3 (for a complete table with all coefficients, see Table C.3) shows the statistically significant effects policy and political information has on trade-offs between policy areas in the unilateral action strategy at the 0.05 level. The number of seats for the president's party in the House of Representatives has different effects in the short- and long-term in the unilateral action strategy. In the short term, it affects only one relationship, causing presidents to prioritize

the economy over other domestic policy. In the long run, an increase in the number of seats held by the president's party in the House causes the president to prioritize government operations, doing so over social welfare, international affairs, and other domestic policy.

The number of seats for the president's party in the Senate, in the short term, causes presidents to de-prioritize the economy. From year to year, president's choose to prioritize other issues, namely social welfare, international affairs, and other domestic policy, rather than the economy when they have increased senatorial support. In the long term, support in the Senate has a different effect; causing presidents to prefer to take unilateral action on issues other than government operations. Presidents prioritize social welfare, international affairs, and other domestic policy, rather than government operations.

The public approval rating of the president affects the way president's prioritize international affairs. For the pairs of international affairs and social welfare, international affairs and economics, and international affairs and other domestic policy, the president chooses to pay less attention to international affairs and more attention to the other policy in the short term. In the long term, there are more diffuse effects. Presidents prioritize social welfare over the economy, government operations, and international affairs, and other domestic policy over the economy and government operations, and de-prioritize government operations by instead prioritizing social welfare, international affairs, and other domestic policy.

The number of years since the last presidential election has an effect on many different pairs of policy areas. In the short term, the number of years since the last election causes presidents to prioritize international affairs over government operation and the economy. It also causes presidents to prioritize other domestic policy over social welfare policy, the economy, and government operation. Finally, it causes presidents to de-prioritize government operations, instead giving attention to social welfare policy, international affairs and other domestic policy. In the long term, the number of years since the last election has a similar effect: the closer a president gets to reelection or the end of their time in office, the more likely they are to prioritize international affairs at the

expense of government operations and the economy, and other domestic policy, at the expense of social welfare, the economy, and government operations.

The percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) change has a limited effect in unilateral action strategy. In the short term, the greater the change in the percent GDP, the more the president prioritizes the economy over government operations and international affairs. In the long term, the effect of the relationship shifts a little. Instead of the commonality between pairs of relationships being the prioritization of the economy, the commonality is the de-prioritize of government operations. In the long term, presidents de-prioritize government operations in favor of paying attention to the economy and other domestic policy.

The level of unemployment has no statistically significant effect in the short run, but in the long run, as the number of unemployed people increases, presidents are more likely to prioritize government operations and de-prioritize other domestic policy. They prioritize government operations over international affairs and other domestic policy and de-prioritize other domestic policy in favor of government operations and the economy.

The level of defense spending has no statistically significant effect in the short term. In the long term, it has much more of an effect, causing presidents to prioritize the economy and prioritize government operations. The economy is prioritized over social welfare policy, international affairs, and other domestic policy. Increased defense spending causes presidents to prioritize issues other than government operations, namely the economy and other domestic policy.

The party of the president has an effect on what presidents prioritize. Democratic presidents are more likely to prioritize international affairs over government operations and the economy. Additionally, they prioritize other domestic policy over social policy, the economy, and government operations.

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